# THE CHANGING VALUES OF ENGLISH SPEECH

RALCY HUSTED BELL

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# THE CHANGING VALUES OF ENGLISH SPEECH

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# THE CHANGING VALUES of ENGLISH SPEECH

By
RALCY HUSTED BELL

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To
The Late
JOHN JAMES INGALLS
Scholar, Statesman, Friend

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. . . . the history of the single word *bedlam* cannot be completely understood without some knowledge of the history of Europe and Asia for more than fifteen hundred years. It would be hard to find a more striking instance of the absurdity of regarding the study of words as a narrow and trivial diversion of pedants. Words are the signs of thoughts and thoughts make history.

WORDS AND THEIR WAYS IN ENGLISH SPEECH

*Greenough and Kittredge*

## CONTENTS


| | PAGE |
|---|---|
| The White Island (Britain) | 1 |
| The Aborigines | 13 |
| Changing Values | 27 |
| English | 35 |
| Early English | 43 |
| Language-Change | 55 |
| The Soul of Words | 67 |
| Poetry And Its "Threadbare" Themes | 83 |
| Syntax And a Word with Professor Lounsbury | 95 |
| Intensives | 109 |
| Variations in Word-meanings | 121 |
| Style | 131 |
| Distinctions in Word-meanings | 153 |
| Some Further Distinctions | 163 |
| The Origin of Language | 179 |
| Some Old Celtic Friends | 199 |
| English Orthography and "Simplified Spelling" | 211 |
| Words Which Have Changed Since Shakspere Wrote The Tragedie of Macbeth | 255 |
| Commonplace Poetry | 269 |
| Books and Authors | 281 |
| Index | 289 |

# THE WHITE ISLAND

## THE WHITE ISLAND

SO far as the English language is concerned, the most important piece of earth's geography is *The White Island* to the westward of Gaul. It was once an isolated spot which Fable peopled with grim giants. It has since become the most renowned kingdom of the world, and has given birth to the greatest of intellectual giants.

The English tongue has become a rank polyglot, and is spreading over the earth like some hardy plant whose seed is sown by the wind. It has crossed seas to continents remote—it has taken root in foreign soil—it has become cosmopolitan—it has grown forgetful of early forms—it has mixed with noisome

weeds—it has blown new blossoms—it is putting forth strange buds, and will continue to grow, to change, to expand, to decay, and to take fresh root again throughout the ages to come; but it will never dissociate itself from the island which gave it birth. The English language and the Union-Jack seem almost to stand for the same thing: the glory of England.

Whatever relates to the history and romance of the British Isles concerns the English language. Legend, tradition and fable are not, usually, pure fabrications. They contain some truth with much invention. The invention is often a pleasing setting for the truth. History, on the other hand, while encompassing much truth with some invention, too often uses its invention clumsily, to the end that truth appears distorted or is rendered unattractive and dry. The grotesque garments of Fable

are gaudy—their masses of bright color attract the bees of the mind which, having good memory, return to them.

Let us then turn back to the past and read why this "White Island"—this "Land of Green Hills"—was first called *Albion* and afterward *Britain.*

There is an Eastern romance which tells us how badly the fifty sons of Danus, King of Greece, were treated by their wives, the fifty daughters of Ægistus, King of Egypt. These faithless spouses thirsted for power. The question as to who should be "boss" was uppermost in their minds. They hatched a murderous conspiracy by which they hoped to slay their husbands and to rule in their stead. One of their own sisters, as usual, betrayed them. Thereupon they were seized and set adrift in ships upon the sea. After many days of stormy weather, they landed in safety upon the shores of a large island which was un-

inhabited. Upon this land, they made their home and called it *Albion* in honor of Albina, their eldest sister. Here they lived by the chase, as many of their sisters have done since, hunting thick-necked wild bulls, swift deer and intolerable boars.

"And while filled with meat and drink, and with . . . . thoughts, they lay sleeping on the ground covered with the skins of wild beasts, dark brooding spirits swept toward them from the sky, and encircled them with their shadowy arms, and intoxicated them with their flaming breath."

"By these were born huge and hideous giants which soon bore others, till they filled the whole land with a strange and fierce crew."

Now, "Troy had fallen: the wanderings of Eneas were past; and Ascanius

had died, leaving behind him his son Silvius."

Silvius was gallant—a maid whom he loved was beautiful. Forsooth, a son was born to them. He was named Bru, or Brutus. It had been foretold by the wise soothsayers before his birth, that this child would be the death, as it were, of his parents; that through their death he should be driven from the land, and that a crown would come to him after many years.

All this politely came to pass. The mother died at his birth. While he was yet a youth, one day a-hunting, he had the poor taste to shoot his father instead of a deer. For this indiscretion of thoughtless boyhood, he was banished. He went to Greece. Having already tasted the honey of regicide, he hungered for the scalp of Pandrasus. His threats against the throne were so plausible, that the king grew nervous and softly persuaded

him, by the gift of his only daughter Imogen, to seek another land over which to rule—throwing into the bargain both sail and treasure.

Accordingly, Brutus, "like Eneas of old, sailed forth upon the waters in search of a new land." On his way, he touched at a strange island, where Diana appeared to him and told him of winsome *Albion*, beyond Gaul, wherein he should prosper.

"For thirty days and thirty nights they sailed past Africa and over the lake of Silvius, and over the lake of Philisteus: by Ruscikadan they took the sea, and by the mountain country of Azare. They fought with the pirates, and gained from them such treasures that there was not a man in the fleet who did not wear gold and pall. And by the pillars of Hercules they were encompassed by mermen who sing songs so sweet that mariners will rest slothfully on their oars, and

listen to them for days without wearying of their songs to hear—these impeded them much with their wicked crafts, but they escaped them safely."

"In a peaceful sea, and among the playing fish they came to Dartmouth in Totnes. There the ships bit the sands, and with merry hearts the warriors went ashore."

"It happened after many days that Brutus and his people were celebrating holy writs, with meat, with drink, and with merry glee sounds: with silver and with gold: with horses and with vestments."

"Twenty strong giants descended the hills: trees were their clubs: in the centre of their foreheads was a single eye vivid as blue ice. They hurled huge stones and slew five hundred of the Trojans. But soon the fierce steel arrows of the Trojans whistled through the air, and blood began to spurt from their mon-

strous sides. They tried to fly; but those darts followed them swift and revengeful, as birds of prey winged with the dark feathers of death."

"Nineteen were slain and Geog-magog, their leader, was brought bound before Brutus, who ordered a wrestling match to be held between the giant and Corineus, a chieftain of his army."

"A mighty crowd gathered upon the downs by the sea-cliff."

"Corineus and the giant advanced toward each other, they yoked their arms and stood breast to breast. Their eyes gushed blood, their teeth gnashed like wild boars, their bones cracked. Now their faces were black and swollen, now red and flaming with rage. Geog-magog thrust Corineus off his breast and drawing him back broke three of his ribs with his mighty hand. But Corineus was not overcome, he hugged the giant grimly to his waist, and grasping him by the

girdle swung him over the cliff upon the rocks below."

"Which spot is called 'Geog-magog's leap' to this day. And to Corineus, the conqueror, was given a dukedom, which was thence called Corinee and thence Cornwall."

"Brutus having conquered the giant offspring of the treacherous sisters, built a new Troy, and erected temples to the great Diana, and caused her to be worshipped throughout the land."

"Which was named *Britain* after Brutus, the first man who set foot upon its shores."

# THE ABORIGINES

## THE ABORIGINES

THE origin of the aborigines of Britain has inspired a good deal of guess-work. The period of their arrival is so remote and the information concerning it is so hazy, that few writers care definitely to affirm much on the subject.

According to Josephus, the Scythians were called *Magogæi* by the Greeks; and the *Magogæi*, most probably, were that tribe of the aborigines spoken of in the Welsh triad:

"The first of the three chieftains who established the colony was *Hu*, the Mighty, who came with the original settlers. They came over the Hazy Sea

from the summer country, which is called Deffrobani, that is where *Constinoblys* now stands."

At the time of Cæsar's invasion, we are told by Tacitus and others that, there were at least three distinct tribes in Britain: the red-haired, blue-eyed Celts of the North; the Silures of Devon and Cornwall, and the "Cassiterides of the Scilly Isles, who had swarthy faces and dark curly hair, like the Iberi of Spain."

In a poem called *The Appeasing of Lhudd*, by the renowned Taliesin of Wales, it appears that the Phœnicians, "at that time the pirate-scourges of the sea," were also "first" settlers of Britain:

"A numerous race, fierce, they are said to have been,
Were thy original colonists, Britain, first of isles,
Natives of a country in Asia, and the city of Gafiz.

Said to have been a skilful people, but the district is unknown
Which was mother to these children, warlike adventurers on the sea;
Clad in their long dress, who could equal them?
Their skill is celebrated, they were the dread of Europe."

It is more than likely that the aborigines of Britain came from several regions of the East. The fable of Ma-gog and Brutus arose, perhaps, from the battles between the Phœnicians and the Scythians. We know that heroes are commonly referred to as giants in the war-tales of early peoples.

This fable, which was once thought to have been a fabrication of the monks, "was first published by Geoffrey of Monmouth"; but later, "it was discovered in the historical poems of Tyssilia, a Welsh bard."

For the fable of Albion, we are indebted to "the ancient chronicles of

Hugh de Genesis, an historiographer now almost forgotten." The tale was taken seriously, and so set forth in his rhymes by John Hardyng. On the strength of it, he advanced the theory that his countrywomen had rightfully inherited their "desire for sovereignty," which he seemed to think was one of their marked peculiarities.

So much for fable and legend of the dateless periods of conjecture. We will now turn to the historians, poets and philosophers. From them we learn that in the aboriginal day, the northern part of Britain was peopled by wild savages who roamed the forests naked, lived on the bark of trees and on the produce of the chase. They took refuge from severe weather in caves, or sheltered themselves as best they could in the woods.

It is said that these savages went naked not because of barbarous ignorance, but rather on account of their vanity, which

with them was a passion. They tattooed their skins at an early age with a pointed instrument and the blue infusion of woad. In one respect they resembled the South-Sea Islanders. The Picts, or painted men, as the Romans called them, used the juice of green grass for coloring themselves.

"Hunting was their favorite exercise and sport, and Britain, which was then filled with vast swamps and forests, afforded them a variety of game."

"The elephant and the rhinoceros, the moose-deer, the tiger and other beasts now only known in Eastern climes, and mammoth creatures that have since disappeared from the face of the earth made the ground tremble beneath their stately tread. The brown bear preyed upon their cattle, and slept in the hollow oaks which they revered. The hyenas yelped by night, and prowled round the

fold of the shepherd. The beaver fished in their streams, and built its earthen towns upon their banks. And hundreds of wolves, united by the keen frosts of winter, gathered round the rude habitations of men and howled from fierce hunger, rolling their horrible green eyes and gnashing their white teeth."

The pastoral tribes lived in the midlands. They owned flocks and herds which furnished them with food and clothing.

"While the inhabitants of the South, who had been polished by intercourse with strangers, were acquainted with many of the arts of civilization, and were ruled by a priesthood which was second to none in the world for its learning and experience."

"They manured their ground with marl, and sowed corn, which they stored

in thatched houses, and from which they took as much as was necessary for the day and having dried the ears, beat the grain out, bruised it, and baked it into bread."

"They ate little of this bread at their banquets, but great quantities of flesh, which they either boiled in water, or broiled upon the coals, or roasted upon spits. They drank ale or metheglin, a liquor made of milk and honey, and sat upon the skins of wolves or dogs."

"They lived in small houses built in a circular form, thatched with rushes into the shape of a cone; an aperture being left by which the smoke might escape."

"Their dress was of their own manufacture. A square mantle covered a vest and trousers, or a deeply-plaited tunic of braided cloth; the waist was encircled by a belt, rings adorned the second finger of each hand, and a chain of iron or brass was suspended from the

neck. These mantles, at first the only coverings of the Britons, were of one color, with long hair on the outside, and were fastened upon the breast by a clasp; with the poorer classes by a thorn."

"The heads were covered with caps made of rushes, and their feet with sandals of untanned skin; specimens of which are still to be met with—of the former in Wales, of the latter in the Shetland Isles."

"The women wore tunics, wrought and interwoven with various colors, over which was a loose robe of coarser make, secured with brazen buckles. They let their hair flow at freedom, and dyed it yellow like the ladies of ancient Rome; and they wore chains of massive gold about their necks, bracelets upon their arms, rings upon their fingers."

"They were skilled in the art of weaving, in which, however, the Gauls had obtained a still greater proficience. The

most valuable of their cloths were manufactured of fine wool of different tints, woven chequer-wise, so as to fall into small squares of various colors. They also made a kind of cloth, which, without spinning or weaving, was, when worked up with vinegar, so hard and impenetrable that it would turn the edge of the sharpest sword."

"They were equally famous for their linen, and sail-cloths constituted a great part of their trade."

"When they had finished the linen in the loom, they had this curious method of bleaching it:

"The flax having been whitened before it was sent to the loom, the unspun yarn was placed in a mortar where it was pounded and beaten in water; it was then sent to the weaver, and when it was received from him made into cloth, it was laid upon a large smooth stone, and beaten with broad-headed

cudgels, the juice of poppies being mingled with the water."

"For scouring clothes, they used a soap invented by themselves, which they made from the fat of animals and the ashes of certain vegetables."

"Distinct from these southern tribes were the inhabitants of the Cassiterides, who wore long black garments, and beards falling on each side of their mouths like wings, and who are described by Pliny as 'carrying staves with three serpents curling round like Furies in a tragedy.' "

These were the aborigines of Britain—these were the ancient lords of the Land of the Green Hills; and they were in many respects superior to the Low-German robbers who swept over their domain, drove them back among the hills, despoiled them of their wives and cattle, and at last all but destroyed their dialects.

They were a brave, hardy, generous, virtuous people, taken all in all. They promised a civilization of splendor, and a language of rare beauty and strength. And the relatively few words which English has happily preserved from their neglected dialects are some of the choicest and best in our tongue.

# CHANGING VALUES

## CHANGING VALUES

EVERYTHING changes: part of the time it is growth, and part of the time decay. The "dead" languages represent decay. The subtleties of meaning which surround words—the aura of a living tongue—are the first to pass away. The values of letters, or symbols, are next to disappear; pronunciation is lost, and, finally, only the skeleton remains. As time proceeds, we retain less and less of the spirit of a language that is "dead." This gradual but certain loss is comparable to decay.

As surely as dead languages decay, living languages change. For, while language is not an organic growth, *per se*, yet its changes may be compared with the evolution, the devolution and the death

of an organic growth. Language is a servant, pure and simple, of the intellect; or, shall we say, a function of the intellect which maintains a kind of immaterial parallelism with material, organic changes? Upon the intellect it must depend as surely as the mind depends upon the body; and when the intellect abandons a particular form of speech, it perishes—just as neglected words perish when they pass out of use. For all practical purposes, then, we must deal with language as though it were, as it virtually is, a thing organic.

When the English Channel began to cut its way through the chalk cliffs, many may have deplored the damage done to property and landscape. Some old women with twig-brooms may have tried to sweep the encroaching waters back toward the North Sea. Maybe some great chieftain—some royal Canute—commanded the salt dew to keep off

his grass, and the tide to recede from his meadows. But the arm of the sea was not withdrawn, and the result tells a story of the inevitability of natural law.

The changes of speech are likewise inevitable. The spirit of change is everywhere inexorable, so far as we know. It cannot be stayed by command of prigs; it cannot be accelerated by chieftains or kings; it cannot be cowed by scholastic moss-backs, and it is altogether contemptuous toward fussy old money-bags forever scratching a psychologic itch.

The law of change dominates alike the personal and impersonal estates of man, just as the law of gravity rules the stars. If *change* is not merely another side of *gravity*, at least it runs parallel with gravity in wondrous sweeps, fascinating curves, mighty swirls and direct flow.

Change proceeds certain-wise, and we

call it progress—contrary-wise, and we call it retrogression; it turns and eddies, and we call it stagnation or non-progression; it moves faster than we are accustomed to notice, and we call it revolution; when its slower order is apparent, we call it evolution; when it reverses itself, as it were, we call it devolution; and finally, what we do not understand about it we call GOD, and then proceed at once to discourse learnedly upon his divine attributes.

So with gravitation—displacement of non-ætheric things in calm æther, or æther in motion—whichever may be the case:—one phase we call attraction, another repulsion, another electricity, others heat, light, magnetism and so forth. But both change and ætheric motion, or gravity, or relative displacement, are primordial, and so far as we know to the contrary, universal.

Yet, in a small way, we have learned

how to turn gravity into certain courses according to our needs; we have succeeded in bending it slightly to our will—that is to say, to our service.

So may we turn language-change into ways of usefulness to our higher needs. But we cannot accomplish this by acts of parliament or by the dictates of well-meaning asses, nor, unfortunately, by the well-worded theories of philosophers. It must be done by the human mind in the parliament of the masses—by the irrevocable authority of usage. All vital changes in language must proceed in accordance with the tendency of the mass-effect of the minds using it.

And so we write books on the subject, think on the subject, discuss it individually and in conference, and tell one another all about it, only to see how futile our efforts are, and how slight is the general effect. Usage is the secret of the changing values of speech, and

back of usage is the need, and back of the need, general ignorance or public enlightenment; in a word, public taste, even as against personal culture.

# ENGLISH

## ENGLISH

AS for English, the tongue we are considering, it probably reached its perfection several centuries ago. Up to that time it *grew*. Since then it has merely changed—is now changing, and will continue to change. The process of change now is, and for a long time probably will continue to be, comparable to decay. For the English language is in a sense a *dead* language. "English," as applied to our present tongue, is a sort of poetic license—a habit and figure of speech. "English" is a polyglot. As it stands today, we may, for the sake of example, liken it to the heart of a tree, or even compare it to an ephemeral temple, the architecture of which lacks unity and is botchy—an unfinished, ever-changing

piece of patch-work. Only in the structure and design of the *sanctum sanctorum* do we find purity, strength and beauty—a style that is nearly satisfying. Nevertheless, the temple is destined to be, I believe, the most useful, the strongest and most beautiful of all the temples of speech.

At present the builders are experimentists: the workmen, for the most part, are ignorant gropers for what they conceive to be the needful. This is the rule: some bring misshapen yellow bricks with which to replace pieces of pure marble of perfect cut. The Architect—that is to say, Usage—is careless, clumsy, awkward and slow: a sort of blind copyist, forever modifying the design—tearing down and rebuilding according to the Master, the human mind in dynamic mass. Master and Architect assume long periods of time for the completion of their work; and they proceed without

especial plans, since they have not yet learned the art of predetermination. In foresight they are woefully blind; and yet their labors are guided by a sublime faith in the result. Peoples are essentially fatalists.

It is only necessary to read the "papers" and follow the discussions of the technical and professional societies, such as, and notably, the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, the American Association of Mechanical Engineers, the American Electro-Chemical Society, and others, in order to obtain an insight into the methods of unconscious corruption of English. The few men in these large and representative bodies who can write well and use their own language logically are literally forced to use a large percentage of bastard words so that they may be understood by their colleagues. Read the brief of the average lawyer, and the contribution of the average M.D. to

medical and surgical "literature" if you are not already totally paralyzed by the abominable "English" of, for instance, the electrical engineers. The cackling of a bevy of ignorant, gossiping old women is classic literature by comparison.

In a word, so-called "class-journalism" and class-contributions generally are great corrupters of decent speech. The discourses of the Clergy, on the other hand, have done more for the cause of good language than they have even for the cause of good conduct and morals. But great as has been the salutary effect of the pulpit upon our language, it is hardly comparable with the greater good effect of journalism. The "editorial" and special writers of "newspaper English" are the strongest conservators of our language, because their influence for good form is constant and far-reaching.

The average "reporter" is not particularly a paragon in many and nameless

essentials; and yet, be it said to his eternal glory, his *English* is far from vile when one considers the kind of stuff he drinks, the stress and action laid upon his work. Daily the average college professor commits sins of speech far more heinous than the nimble-witted, hustling reporter ever does—at least, so it seems to me.

So we find the conservators of our tongue working like busy bees for the purity and sweetness of speech; and not far away in greater numbers we see the corrupters working like tumble-bugs in linguistic corruption. So far as language is concerned, both bee and tumble-bug, as it were, obey secondary laws in the conserving of good form on the one hand, and in the perpetrating of execrable form on the other. The stress of these modern times is the primary law which shapes men and directs their interests. Language is merely a code of business con-

venience: to the great masses of mankind it is in no sense a fine art. To the newspaper writers and to the authors, good form in linguistics is merely a matter of technique—a secondary law which has fallen almost to the level of *métier*, so to speak.

And yet, out of all this seething mass of fermenting speech will come, we hope, the pure wine of expression worthy the gods—a wine which will be drunken by future generations of men in song and story, and which shall inspire interpretations of glory on the lips of science and art.

# EARLY ENGLISH

## EARLY ENGLISH

ENGLISH has ever been a composite tongue. When Julius Cæsar made his first diplomatic call at the Court of the British people, in the year 55 B. C., he found the inhabitants speaking a Celtic dialect. When the great general returned to Rome, he left behind him a memory and perhaps a very few Latin words. If the memory of the genial Cæsar impressed the Britons, it was not altogether on account of his tongue.

Such, however, was not the case with Agricola, a hundred and thirty-six years later; for with the building of his famous forts, he committed other and more lasting abominations. Not content with the making of Britain a Roman province,

he introduced Latin, which in turn led to an invasion by a new and strange religion somewhere about the year 180, present era. But Latin was not introduced first into Britain by Generals Cæsar and Agricola. Some stray Latin words had found their way there in prehistoric times. They were, however, meek, non-insistent words and were easily subjugated. They were the mere scout-words of a later-day, arrogant army of Latin words which overran Europe and America.

After the withdrawal of the Romans, a notorious Mr. Hengest invaded Britain with his ruthless hordes of Low-Germans who spoke Teutonic dialects which, collectively and loosely, have been called Anglo-Saxon. Three tribes, speaking these dialects of the great Aryan or Indo-European language, played important rôles in the conquest of Britain, the division of her territory, and the subjugation

of the native tongue. This began in the year of grace 449; and the three tribes are known as Angles, Saxons and Jutes. The Angles took possession of the region north of the Humber, which included a goodly part of low-Scotland as far to the northward as Aberdeen. The Saxons fell upon the country south of the Thames and made it theirs; while the modest Jutes contented themselves with the Midland district, and founded the rich Kingdom of Kent.

This was the birth of the so-called Anglo-Saxon tongue in Angles-Land (England), as Britain was called. Broadly speaking, Anglo-Saxon was a union of the Saxon (Old-English and Norman) dialects with the Northumbrian and Mercian (Anglian or Englisc).

For the sake of confusion, in the name of convenience, the vernacular of ancient England has been divided into three parts: Old-English (one-third Wessex),

A.D. 450—1150; Middle-English, 1150—1300; Early-English, 1300—1500. However, as details must be avoided as much as possible in this discourse, Early English denotes, in a general way, the vernacular down to the year 1500. All the dialects, together with many foreign words, contributed to this tongue; and it is well known that in the eighth century the dialects of the Angles, Jutes and Saxons were clearly intelligible to one another. The Northumbrian was first to attain ascendancy over the other two; Wessex came second, and finally the Mercian prevailed.

As Latin words had become implanted in Celtic speech, so did Celtic infuse words into Anglo-Saxon; and the Danes, by their invasion of England in 787, 832, and especially in the year 855, when they wintered at Kent, sowed Scandinavian words, more or less, over all England until the Norman Conquest in 1066.

This composite tongue, beginning roughly at 450, developed into what is known as Early English.

After the year 450 an influx of other foreign words gradually modified and finally dominated Early English. Trade with Holland naturally introduced many Dutch words. Early English was not only already composite, but it was so much under the influence of foreign tongues in 1258, that when Henry III issued his famous proclamation in the native language on the 18th of October, in that year, it made a sensation that has not entirely died out even to this day. Edward III, in 1358, brought back from his invasion of France some French words. In the same year English was first taught in the schools. As early as 1339 law-courts conducted their pleadings in English and recorded them in Latin. Thus we find that Anglo-French, Norman-French and Latin, which had

held powerful sway over Early English, were partly pushed aside in 1385. And yet, as late as 1455–71, during the Wars of the Roses, there were "three distinct and well-marked literary dialects of English: the Northern (Northumbrian), Midland (Mercian), and Southern (Saxon)." The result of that struggle gave the ascendancy to the Midland, which became the standard literary dialect, and has since held sway over the language.

Then came the introduction of printing into England in the year 1477, which wrought a change in the spelling. The heterogeneous, phonetic style, in which everybody suited himself, gave way to a more or less uniform method which has continued with all its changing faults, until more recent times, when jumping-jack spelling reformers pine and cry for a liberty that is as confusing as it is olden.

During and after the reign of Edward VI, many Greek words were adopted

*directly* by Science and Literature—words which were refused by the spoken vernacular. Before the time of Cheke, who taught at Cambridge, Greek words came principally by way of Latin and French; that is to say, *indirectly;* and, for the most part, these Latinized and Gallicized Greek words concerned ecclesiastical and medical subjects.

Before 1300 the number of French words introduced into Early English was inconsiderable. They came sparingly at first after the Norman Conquest; but during the fourteenth century "the influx of them was immense"; and at the beginning of the fifteenth century "the composite character of our language was completely established."

Through the law-courts many Old-French words came into use and are still retained—words no longer in current use, together with many that never found their way there.

Early English had reached a high degree of development in the eleventh century. The influence of Norman-French on Wessex, the literary dialect at the time of the Norman Conquest, was at first one of suppression; its influence was curtailed to its own province. The court consisted of Normans who continued to speak their own tongue. Norman-French became the language of society as well. The literary men no longer found it advisable to write in the Wessex, but chose, instead, their own local dialects when writing in the vernacular. "In other words, the Norman Conquest put the dialects of England once more on their mettle."

After the loss of Normandy to England, early in the thirteenth century, "the specific influence of Norman-French upon the English language was very slight indeed. . . . In the latter part of the thirteenth century and throughout

the Fourteenth," Norman-French gave way to Central or Parisian French, which "was now the recognized standard on the Continent, and the French of the English Court was not Norman, but as good Parisian French as the nobility could muster." And we find that the large majority of French words introduced into English since the year 1300 came from the Parisian French.

Through the influence of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Semitic languages—Hebrew and Arabic—also contributed some words to Early English. This was but natural, since the Scriptures had made them familiar to the Greek, Latin and French authors. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, there were virtually no other sources from which English drew foreign words. This brings us to the year 1500, at which Modern English begins.

# LANGUAGE-CHANGE

## LANGUAGE-CHANGE

THE need as surely precedes a new word, as the seed the plant. The growth of language is firmly rooted in the soil of common necessity. To the student, there should be no mystery in its growth—nothing startling in its change. The phenomenon of language-growth does not warrant the usual vague, metaphysical explanation so dear to many writers on the subject. The trouble with these expounders is, that their learning confuses rather than clarifies their understanding. Over-specialized endeavor often distorts the perspective. There is a kind of hypnotic embarrassment, or something akin to it, in large profusion of detail.

Suppose one were to describe the evolution of the apple, for instance: Summers by the thousand have kissed its cheek;

unnumbered dawns have wept wooing tears upon its pink bloom; countless dreaming days have breathed warmly upon its leaves; until finally, we behold the hope of the sun, as a holy prayer fulfilled, in the ripened flesh of the perfected fruit. We may trace the apple back from its present development to those early days when it was a wild, acrid, gnarly thing scarcely larger than a cherry. We may note the changes of its growth, and the causes producing them. It may interest such of us as are inclined to the study of chemistry, to consider its acids and their slow modifications—to direct inquiries into the action of sunlight upon chlorophyl. The effects of soil, climate and cultivation may be noted. The process of grafting—inter-marrying of varieties—may justly claim our attention; but it would hardly profit us to spend much time in speculating as to the number of green apples required two

hundred and fifty thousand years ago to disturb the digestion of a young savage. And yet, unfortunately, there are well-known writers upon language, who would lead us into speculations equally useless concerning words.

Much has been written to no purpose on the origin of words. Definite information on the subject would be pleasing; but heavy guessing dragged through pages of wearisome and stilted discourses is tiresome, to say nothing more.

Of this we may be reasonably sure: Perfected language was never put into man's mouth, as a juicy apple, from the skies. Language is as surely a development as is man himself a development. Every word that ever blessed his lips was complement to a need. As needs slowly dawned upon human consciousness, signs were invented to tally them. At first they were gestures, and later, combinations of gestures and sounds; these signs

were as savage as the needs they named. Even now, it is not a very far cry from the growl of a savage gnawing at a bone, to the commands of some folk at table in our fashionable hostelries.

From the rude signs of primitive man all languages have evolved. At first, there could have been little or no relation between these coarse symbols of want. Gradually, relations came into being and slowly widened, until the golden threads of common thought wove the more chastened symbols into that meaning which we call speech; and, at last, into a tongue capable of expressing the soul of Keats, or all that a civilized man may feel and dream.

It is precisely as man develops soul, and synchronously, that his words acquire sense—so much and no more. According to the same law, delicacy of feeling fathers euphemism of expression, even as a brutal instinct shows itself in heartless words and cruel tones.

It is a misfortune that so many earnest students in language, who write learnedly on the subject, concern themselves so little with wider research. For, truly, language is a thing of life—not in the sense of an animal organism, but in that greater sense of encompassing everything, interweaving through everything, and depending upon everything in the universe that makes conscious and subconscious impression upon the sensitive nervous structure of the high type of organized beings who use it.

A proper comprehension, therefore, of the spirit of language, and of the properties of words, must rest upon the multitudinous things with which the intellect of man has to do. To be qualified, as a teacher, to discuss language with its wondrous and changing word-mosaics, its varying phrases and shifting idioms, one should be acquainted with physics and philosophy, with the sciences and

arts, with the development and induction of harmony in sound, color and form—with the trails of ontogeny, the blazings of phylogeny—in a word, with the highways and byways of human *thought* and human *feeling* not only, but with that pantheism of feeling, as it were, which lies beneath all expression. Just as even the dimmest understanding of psychology must be based upon an acquaintance with the phenomena of physiology, electro-chemistry, mechanics and physics; upon evolution, natural selection, environed growth and heredity, so is the comprehension of the soul of words and the spirit of a tongue dependent upon some slight understanding, at least, of countless things pertinent to the development of language, and of the race using it.

As I have said elsewhere, language serves man according to his needs. The cannibal gets on very well with *long-pig*

and *short-pig;* but the soul of a Shakspere would be starved to death with the paucity of a cannibal tongue.

Language-change is not always language-growth—but is often mistaken for growth. In ethics, for example, language does not seem to change materially, because, perhaps, ethics has practically stood still for many centuries. In looking backward we may see, to be sure, a changing sense of delicacy reflected in words—but that is about all.

Whether the human race is making real progress, or merely shifting its position of interest from philosophy to mechanics and commercialism, may be questioned by some; but that it is engaged in tremendous change, no one can doubt. It is patent that the overwhelming majority of the race is primarily and basically interested in commercialism and mechanics. To millions of souls, self-preservation is adjunctive to these. The com-

plex and astounding changes that have occurred in these fields of endeavor have revolutionized the world. Language must keep pace with the change—and it surely will.

This means addition and modification of words and their varying significances. Whether this irresistible change will constitute a growth in which shall be the elements of strength, utility and beauty—simplicity it is inevitably losing—or, whether the change will merely overrun us in a rank Babel of confusion, depends, of course, upon the manners of mankind through ages to come.

We hope that all linguistic change will purify itself on the lips of the world. It is certain that language, sweet and pure as a woodland spring, should be a blessed inheritance to the children of men, even as light, air and soil. In a sense, language is an inheritance; but only in a sense. For as light, air and soil are

denied by barbarous conditions unto thousands upon thousands of human beings, so is wholesome language denied them. The soulful element of their tongue is withheld from them by similar causes which deny them their birthright of air, light and soil. They get just enough of any of these to support life on the lowest planes of thought and being. *It should be the bounden duty of the thoughtful person to try to conserve the force and beauty of his tongue, thereby rendering wide service to all.*

Language will change as human interests change. No one should wish to restrict its elasticity or retard its normal growth; but we should see to it, that it does not overrun the fair garden of the soul in wild, uncultivated profusion. It should not be allowed to diverge from the parallelism of fact. Its wilder elements, as it were, should not be unduly encouraged lest they acquire pernicious

activity. In that, there is no real growth, or, to say the least, not the most wholesome growth. And press however hard we may the careful classic brake to ever-rolling speech, the wheel will yet move fast enough for every need, and yet find enough of vulgar soil to cling to it. In time we hope this will not be. When man shall learn to breed the babes of soul as carefully as now he breeds the supple flesh of speed in beasts, all this will change. Then the common speech will be the only classic tongue; but between *then* and *now*, we must also learn, that human life is more valuable than dollars—that earth and air and light and health and joy are the birthright of babes—that women should bear only welcome burdens—that failures and misfits of poverty and crime and ignorance have no right to add to the population of the world. Until then, we must safeguard our speech as we would our morals.

# THE SOUL OF WORDS

# THE SOUL OF WORDS

## I

THE "inner life" of man is a myth. A very ancient superstition, which has not yet entirely passed away, endowed man with a mysterious attribute called "inner life." That view is no longer held by the thoughtful element of our kind. Metaphorically, we speak quite properly of the *soul* of words and of man, and of the *spirit* of a tongue. In this sense, *soul* can mean little else than the harmonized, summed-up, or aggregate characteristics which are pleasing in a person or thing. It might be likened to a crystallization in human conception of that which common consent deems beautiful and good. That is somewhat different from the vague conception of "inner

life" as applied to man. So, also, in the expression: the *spirit* of a tongue. *Spirit* here means the unbroken warp of gold, which harmonizes the relations of words into the woof of language, making it at once beautiful, useful and strong.

If man were possessed of "inner life," deeply hidden from his fellows, it would surely find outlet in his speech, diffuse itself among his associates, and thus become not his *inner*, but in reality his *outer*, life. For, as certainly as the language of a people reflects its character, so do the words of a person, with astonishing accuracy, picture the soul of the speaker. The art of diplomacy is not subtle enough to lead the intelligent listener astray. Language never conceals thought from the keen-witted—from one who has eyes to see and ears to hear; and, paradoxical as it may be, it is also true that language too rarely reveals any real thought.

The ancients recognized that as a man lives, so must he also speak. This being true, it might be urged that the first lessons in language should be lessons in right-living. Well and good! that cannot be gainsaid; but no lesson in right-living—the most difficult of all things to teach or learn—is complete without the facility to express clear and beautiful thought. This inheres in strong, sweet, wholesome speech developed into a resourceful tongue.

It is thought by some, that a man's language mirrors his heart because he voluntarily selects from an immense number of words a vocabulary to his liking and according to his needs—words which fit his mouth. But this is true in part only, and of a relatively small number of persons. Most folk have their words thrust upon them; yet, notwithstanding this, there is a nameless somewhat in their language besides individual words,

that reveals character with terrible precision. Phraseology, intonation, gesture, style: these are to be reckoned with. So, in a subject simple enough at first thought, is discovered increasing perplexity as we ponder it.

No one will deny that it would be better, if all were rich enough in experience with the beautiful, and fortunate enough in blood, and broad enough in culture, and philosophic enough in feeling, to select our vocabulary wisely and well from the elements of our tongue; but, alas, as this is impossible at our present stage of development, it becomes well-nigh imperative, that the more favored in this respect should concern themselves with *classic* speech; trusting the *press* and oral example to sow beautiful, strong words with liberal hand, until holy thought may widely blossom, and pure speech bless a wilderness of weeds into a world-garden of beautiful flowers.

Suggestion is a potent element in this world's doings. It is powerful in language, as elsewhere—more potent in speech than manywhere, because it has to do so largely with vast numbers. The nature of an individual is rarely revolutionized by essays or mere oral preachments. The coarse man will be known by his adjectives. Impulsiveness and enthusiasm, logically, must deal with superlative degrees. The real thinker will show conscience and modesty in his speech. The pure in heart will speak from the fulness thereof, well knowing that baseness lingers on the breath and pollutes the air; that men have damned themselves, even as they have glorified themselves, with a single word.

"The magic of literature lies in the words and not in any man. Witness, a thousand excellent, strenuous words can leave us quite cold or put us to sleep,

whereas a bare half-hundred words breathed by some man in his agony, or in his exaltation, or in his idleness, ten generations ago can still lead whole nations into and out of captivity, can open to us the doors of three worlds, or stir us so intolerably that we can scarcely abide to look at our own souls."

Sweet words—strong words, chosen with fine discrimination, scattered among the multitude may revolutionize a race; such is the ever-widening potency of their suggestion as related to numbers. It is fortunate that there is a fatality for the beautiful and good in this world; for, without it, all would have been lost ages ago.

## II

The great of earth may be divided into three classes: those who, by their mastery of words, give life to highest art; those who, by their mastery of harmony in sound, color and curve, thrill beauty into being; and those students in science who succeed without special recourse to the mastery of words, and without any marked reference to the soul of beauty.

If Shakspere's fame needed other genius than his own to send it "down the ringing grooves of change," changeless in its glory, Ingersoll and Swinburne have supplied the want. It seems to me, that they have uttered the last word of praise; that they have painted the perfect picture of his marvellous soul with the matchless pigments of their own; and that what-

ever more may be said must be merely commonplace by comparison.

We know that Shakspere, consciously or not, had to do with the soul of words. He was easily king of metaphor. The wondrous alchemy of his brain transformed the gross to gold; it touched the coarsest clay, and lo! it was aglow with love. This many-sided man toyed with words as a god might play with the hearts of men; and this god-like dalliance of his never brutalized his words. He breathed upon them and they wept. He threw them into careless, happy throngs where mirth and rollick-laughter soothed the hurts of day and banished the ghosts of night. He peopled the brain with beauty; threw strange silhouettes of shadow over the horizon's edge; and far above the highest peaks of thought, he sowed all the heavens of the soul with myriad stars of hope. He thought, and his words were wise; he

felt, and they thrilled with infinite passion; he looked out upon the green fields of England, and in his soul every blossom was mated with a word; every blade of grass and leaf and brook and living thing were tallied with the teeming symbols of his brain. Within his heart the very stones had speech. Words to him were significant—more than lifeless blocks with which to rear the glittering domes of thought. He was an architect who built with *life*. He gave to words their weight and worth. He never debased a syllable of his tongue—never mutilated a word—never prostituted its meaning—never humiliated it into slavery. Every word, therefore, was a winged spirit eager to do homage to his genius; and through all these many years, they have served him as faithfully as love ever serves the heart of man.

Herbert Spencer says: "Men ought to regard their language as an inheritance

to be conserved, and improved so far as that is possible, and ought not to degrade it by reversion to lower types. It should be a matter of conscience not to misuse words; it should also be a matter of conscience to resist misuse of them. Especially should our own language be thus guarded. If, as several unbiased foreign judges hold, the English language will be, and ought to be, the universal language, it becomes the more a duty to mankind to check bad habits of speech."

Robert G. Ingersoll, one of the greatest masters of English speech, was also a lover of words. He handled them with the affection of a mother for her babe. He arranged them always with reference to three things: fact, force and beauty. With supreme tact, he never mixed uncongenial words. His art never had recourse to trick. His antitheses were of stress. Fact never marred the beauty of his speech, and its beauty never weakened

its force. Within his heart dwelt infinite tenderness—even for words.

This is also true of all other great poets—there is no secret in their craft; Shakspere, Chaucer, Tennyson, Swinburne, Poe, Burns and Hugo! all were lovers of words—and I hope of women. And so it must ever be. Voltaire aptly said: "The worst works are commonly the most defective in language."

The genius of a tongue has reference to harmony, and harmony in this sense must be wooed primarily from the soul of words.

Our language is virtually a thing of life; it is nourished by the people it serves; it must flourish or decay, expand or shrink; it must grow clearer and more beautiful, or more complex and vague. Each one of us owes it a precise duty. No one has a right to sin against his mother tongue, and no one should be excused for so doing. Our

words of daily use deserve and demand the same hygienic cleanliness that our persons deserve and demand. Beauty demands that they shall not be mutilated; utility demands that they shall not be confused; decency demands that they shall not be degraded; justice assures them consideration. It is as important to conserve the integrity and morality of words, as of peoples; indeed, the morality in one case may largely depend upon that of the other. Clean speech is as wholesome as fine linen. Careful speech is a form of real etiquette. Beautiful words are better than royal purples.

It is not meant by this that our daily speech should be splinted in plaster moulds, or in any other manner robbed of its wholesome spontaneity, or that the natural exuberance of feeling should be suppressed, or that the heart should smother its wails beneath the compressed lips of false dignity. That is not human.

Rigidity is rather more consistent with death than with life. Extremes seldom promote lasting good.

If one is master of his words—heart to heart at ease with them—his style need concern him little. Style then is merely a question of individual temperament, and is ever lifeless, cold and false unless based upon these: *beauty*, *fact* and *force*. Uncongenial words must not be yoked together; their companionship should be governed by their inherent predominant significances. Besides, there are the equally insistent shades, subtleties of humor, colors, tones and fractions of tones which must be considered. Furthermore, a natural, easy, judicious alliteration is essential to the noblest style; and it is also essential to remember, that the least bit too much of the alliterative effect is worlds too much—it sounds foolish—it is affectation—it is not art, not style; and it robs words of their soul.

# POETRY

# POETRY

## AND

## ITS "THREADBARE" THEMES

OPINION varies as to what constitutes poetry—otherwise less rubbish would desecrate the name; but difference of opinion shrinks as people become learned and thoughtful. The tendency of culture is always toward intellectual socialism. The spirit of enlightenment moves away from intellectual anarchy. This blessed fact consecrates our labor as we struggle to acquire knowledge; it makes wisdom holy. No one works and suffers to become wise for himself, only. In most cases it is not worth while. The individual is little at best—mankind is everything. Our gratitude for benefits

received from the laborers of the past is a debt we must pay to the future.

Poetry today is a bank account deposited to our credit by our forefathers. The every-day things of the dim past are the rarely poetic things of the present. The poetry of the future will excel that of today, as the things of today outrank those of the yester years.

To the thoughtful, this is plain enough. If all the learned folk were thoughtful, there would be scarcely any difference in opinion, but as they are not, the learned very often express themselves without deliberation. In such cases, the act is an explosion rather than an opinion. It is a kind of mishap which may be likened to the powder-flash from the pan. Thus, in the realm of chance, they discharge a fact only once out of many times; and even then the law of probability intervenes between the muzzle and the mark in the majority of instances.

This may be the reason why some worthy writers affirm that poetry is merely a question of *manner*, not *matter*, so to speak. In other words, that anything might be coined into poetry, if the manner be apt, the handling skilful and the form true. Others seem to think that poetry is determined almost solely by matter, and that manner is incidental.

Between these extreme view-points, there is a broad common premise on which to stand; but from either extreme, argument is vain. As well say:

> "What is mind? No matter.
> What is matter? Never mind."

How a sensible person can deny that poetry depends upon both form and theme, is a perpetual wonder to me. I can much more readily understand those who inquire why poets so much concern themselves with "threadbare" themes. It is asked, Why do they not sing of the

*new*—of the marvellous results of science, of the wondrous laws of physics, lately discovered—of the beautiful functions of physiology, the mysterious phenomena of energy, the amazing works of invention, the intricacy of mechanics, the pathos of sociology, and of the servitude and sputtering pranks of confined lightning? Why do not the poets sing of these instead of the human passions, the wonders and beauties of nature, the charm of ethics, the glories of war, and the phases of religion sifted through the stained windows of old cathedrals? It is sagely prophesied that some time some great poet will.

A little reflection discovers the impossibility of such a task at present. The impossible should not be expected even from a poet. All poetic themes are, in a sense, organic. They must be mellowed by time and have the enchantment of association. They must have

the softened perspective which beauty chisels from the years. New conceptions and new phases of conception rarely lend themselves to poetry. Nothing can be poetic that has not ripened in the heart and brain of man. Countless ages of subconscious impression, perhaps, are essential. The flowing spring, the falling snow, the sailing ship, the moody humors of the sea, love and passion, the fireside of home, the pathos of parting and joy of reunion, birth and death, the hopes of the heart, the dreams of the soul, the deep wonder of the skies, the wailing of the winds, strife and war, towering peak and angry torrent, the silent plains reaching out to embrace the sky, the painted fields and sombre wood, day and night, beauty fainting in the arms of tragedy, the furies of mid-winter and the warm heart of June—these are the poetic themes that marry poetic form.

So it is with words. It is well under-

stood that certain words are poetic while certain others, equally good, are not. The poetic words are the old words, many of them archaic. Newly coined words, however sound and fit, seldom serve the needs of poetic thought. This shows how words grow into the very soul of man. The symbols of poetry are never the mushrooms of speech.

When, in the course of the ages, man shall winnow from the results of science the beautiful and good which are to abide with him—when the nomenclature of physics shall be as old and dear as the words *home* and *love* now are—when the phenomena of energy and the functions of physiology shall inspire Art with feeling—when machines shall bear affectionate names, and sociology shall be reduced to the simplest laws of sense—when new applications of force shall have transported us through the air for a thousand years, and thus have become

old—when this world shall be looked upon as the Fatherland, and other worlds shall be visited as summer- and winter-resorts, then may poets weave these things into song ever warm on the Muse's lips:—but not until then.

Poets who have already made the attempt have failed, or succeeded indifferently. Whitman has written much that is incomparable poetry today; but much, also, that he has written will not be poetry until the centuries shall have chastened his themes. And it may be that the centuries will wear much of his work away. Still, enough will remain, I hope, to keep the wreath forever green upon his memory.

The steam-engine is barely approaching the poetic zone; by the time it reaches it, maybe, it will be no more. But the old spinning-wheel, the post-chaise and the "fiery charger" are in the torrid zone of song. No poet sings of the threshing

machine, nor of the splendid reaper that does the work of many hands; but of the beating flails he sings; and the sickle and scythe hang on the apple-limbs in the perpetual summer of his dreams. So with the tall clock, the old tower, the ivied wall, the ruined cathedral, the crumbling château! these seem best in song.

Love and all the common phases of love—the beauty and tears of devotion—the terrors of war—the fascination of the passions—these have become part of man by association and development through the years: they are poetic matter. The same is true concerning the eternal question of the stars—the modest beauty of trailing arbutus—the apologetic grace of drooping violets—the poems of the wood where streams of melody flow from straining throats of happy birds, and laughing brooks steal through silent beds of moss; these are the "threadbare"

themes of poetry. Such as these must concern the poet until the *new* shall entwine, as a vine, the far-coming years.

# SYNTAX

# SYNTAX

## AND

## A WORD WITH PROFESSOR LOUNSBURY

The doctrine of the joining of words and sentences, or syntax, treats of the laws of speech.

*Maetzner.*

SYNTAX is to the writer as technique is to the painter. A great painter is the master—not the slave—of his technique. He is not bound by any set of rules. And yet, his greatest freedom lies in a careful observance of the natural principles which govern his particular art. The greater knowledge he has of these principles, the greater is his facility for the producing of a desired effect. Whatever may be his style, proportionately as he lacks this precise knowledge, his work must lack the elements of a master-

piece, and to that extent will show weakness or self-uncontrol. No great painter has ever achieved his success through a violation of these natural laws. If he has conformed to their requirements unconsciously, he has nevertheless conformed to them essentially, if not unconditionally. His technique—the mastery of his tools—depends upon his knowledge of natural phenomena which are related to the evolution of his effect in art. In this, *feeling* and *imagination* play no part—since it is only after he has become master of his technique, that he can deal effectively with those higher requisites of artistic expression and creation.

Words and phrases to the writer are as media and pigments to the painter. It is absurd to say that Art has nothing to do with Science. A painter, for instance, who violates the laws of chemistry, who is regardless of the principles of optics, who is heedless of the laws of harmony

in color, line, form and balance, and who disregards the differences between surface-light and body-light in his picture, can never hope to produce a work of art. So-called *artistic temperament*—feeling and imagination—"cuts a poor figure" when it conflicts with natural law.

With the writer it is precisely the same. The art of language-expression cannot attain its highest aim regardless of syntax. And yet, the great writer does not trouble himself about the rules of grammar;—children and pedants do that. He does not stop in the midst of his thought to square some wry relations which may, perchance, exist between some fussy old verb and its stubborn upstart-subject or object. He is more concerned with the clear, strong and beautiful expression of an idea, than with some moot point of grammar. All this is because the great writer is master of his vocation. He observes the natural

harmonies of his tongue—the harmony between thought and phrase and word. He encompasses the unity of purpose with the unity of effect. He considers the real and not the fancied significances of words. He regards the logic of position and the need of balance. He is so familiar with the natural principles which govern the art of language-expression, that grammars and rhetorical guide-books encumber rather than help. He knows perfectly well, that grammars are more or less correct formulations or rules based upon natural laws; but, as he understands the laws themselves, and their relations to expression, he has no need of the rules.

So much for the master—the genius—the great writer! Unfortunately, all men are not masters of expression. Many writers are not geniuses in this one respect, at least; and yet, they are capable of worthy and useful work. If such writers find immediate help and stimulation to-

ward higher effort, in books devoted to the science underlying correct expression, and to its overlying art, then such books are justified in spite of the awful contempt of such mighty men as Professor Lounsbury.

There are thousands of literary workers in this world who, unlike Mr. Lounsbury and a few others, have not "been born, so to speak, in the purple." Yet there is no reason why they should not acquire by effort some small part, at least, of the knowledge which Mr. Lounsbury received at his "purple" birth; for only in this way, perhaps, could the future Lounsburys possess this useful acquisition. It is reasonably certain, that not even Mr. Lounsbury would object to this plebeian method of the acquiring of knowledge, if it were meekly suggested to him that what is plebeian in one generation may be quite aristocratic in another.

Mr. Lounsbury thinks that the grammarian should be "taught to know his place." That is perfectly right. A grammarian out of his place is a great nuisance—almost as much so as the self-appointed arbiter who would "schoolmaster" a tongue, and who would foist upon a patient people the fusty vagaries of a musty class-room. A grammarian who does not know his place, may be very decidedly disconcerting; and it is known that he has been, on occasion, rather overbearing; besides, now and then, one is gifted with an impish sense of the ridiculous. At all events, a mere grammarian has no business to point out any of the many glaring syntactical mistakes of a Professor "born in the purple"—and has less right to laugh at scholastic pretense too weak to "make good," or at scholastic inheritance too slovenly to exercise care. Certainly, Professor Lounsbury is not the only great or little man who has made

mistakes. He deserves, therefore, neither more ridicule nor less censure than the others. But a mistake is a mistake, no matter by whom made.

There is, possibly, no greater error in fact than this—to quote more of Mr. Lounsbury's own words:

"Take, for example, Latin. If a word or construction occurs in Cicero, the question of its propriety is settled at once. No one thinks of disputing the authority of so great a master of the speech.

"The same principle applies to English. It follows therefore that when we find an expression *of any sort* [italics not his] employed by a writer of the first rank, the assumption must always be that this particular expression is proper."

Mr. Cicero was a great authority by virtue of his genius and by common con-

sent. No one doubts that. But neither does any sane person believe for a moment that Cicero was incapable of error. With all due reverence and respect for his greatness, yet, be it said, he has never been endowed with pontifical authority over letters. He was not infallible. The literary Pope has not yet been born. An error by Cicero was no less an error than one by Lounsbury, however grotesque the comparison. In neither case should an error be exalted or justified. In science and art, as in other fields of intellectual labor, there is no such thing as *lèse majesté*. Those of the "purple" birth—of genius and undoubted authority—are just as much mistaken when they make linguistic errors, as are the humblest born of their human fellows. A mistake by the greatest of men is no more sacred than one made by the least. And an error in speech should no more be emulated and condoned in the greatest

writer, or in the greatest authority in linguistics, than in the speech of the proverbial hod-carrier. For, to quote again from Professor Lounsbury: "There are matters in regard to which no height of genius can supply the place of a little accurate knowledge. When a great writer steps forth to enlighten us upon a question of language, for the proper consideration of which an historical investigation is essential, he has gone out of the province where he is a recognized authority and placed himself in a situation in which in nine cases out of ten his words will not carry so much weight as do those of the dullest specialist who has made a study of the origin and history of the form or construction under discussion."

Professor Lounsbury unnecessarily concerns himself, it seems to me, with "rules which are constantly [meaning *continually**] dangled before the eyes of inex-

* See *The Worth of Words.*

perienced writers." The rule of common-sense, quite as much as of grammar, which prohibits the comparative use of the superlative adjective, is disdainfully put aside. He has buttressed his contentions by quoting the mistakes of Cicero. Call something a "rule of grammar" and the Professor becomes impatient. He exhibits errors in grammar as gems of perfectness if only they be found in the works of the wise. Because Shakspere wrote, "Silence is the *perfectest* herald of joy," he concludes that "perfectest" is an adjective form justified by "good usage." It matters not to him that what the great Poet meant and virtually said was merely, *the herald of joy NEAREST perfect.* It is only fair to presume that Shakspere, although not of the cloth professorial, knew that if a thing were perfect it could not be more so, and that some things were nearer perfect than others. The Professor also

quotes Bacon and others to prove that an error if found in the writings of great authors is not necessarily an error, but rather an example of "good usage" to be "constantly dangled before the eyes of inexperienced writers." He quotes with joy Spenser's lines:

> "Against two foes of so exceeding might
> The *least* of which was match for any knight."

Mr. Lounsbury searches through the writings of the renowned for such examples and holds them to be marks of "good usage" not only, but insists that they are also protests against the forms of grammar. He overlooks the fact that the genius of the Masters arrogates to itself various forms of "poetic license" for the sake of meter or strength or diction, rather than as protests against the "rules of grammar."

# INTENSIVES

## INTENSIVES

WITHOUT the use of intensives, speech would still be intelligible. Old-maidish men could still spin their pithless yarns in yawning clubs and timorous professors could still maintain a social status in a community of pious gossips. Persons who mistake a puniness of language for the politeness of good breeding, would be able to pass through life with little shock to their sensitive souls. But language is for the virile quite as much as it is for the moral and intellectual eunuchs. Pious knaves and meeklings, if unable to withstand the sabre-strokes of speech, must step aside or fall. Language, first of all, should serve the strong, the robust in character

and the vigorous of soul. To do this it must be rich. If it fail to express deep feeling, it is poor.

Intensives belong to the class of sturdy words. They batter heads better than clubs. They are more explosive than powder. They are excellent daggers with which to pierce a villain's breast. Like strong, sharp pins, they serve to transfix the little beetles of our kind. They stimulate the lethargic, clench meaning into the mind of man, and even fashion gilded masks of flattery with which to please the vanity of some women. Like snell arrows, these words pierce the heart and quicken its beat. Even profanity, so called, is not only useful at times, but highly moral as well. It may be invigorating and wholesome. It may be definite, and it often clears the atmosphere. Curses have thundered down the ages. They are, on occasion, as eloquent as prayer—and just about as helpful. Pro-

fanity, quite as much as a sermon, may stand for righteousness.

When Abraham Lincoln was a young man he visited a slave-market in New Orleans. "A young colored girl was on the block. Lincoln heard the brutal words of the auctioneer—the savage remarks of the bidders. The scene filled his soul with indignation and horror. Turning to his companions, he said, '*Boys, if I ever get a chance to hit slavery, by God, I'll hit it hard!*" If Lincoln's use of emphasis in this case was profane, then *love*, the holiest word of all our speech, is wicked.

For comparison, let us substitute for Lincoln's righteous words, this weak and wretched phrase: *Boys, if I should ever have the opportunity to smite slavery I shall do so with great force.* Very gentlemanly, and equally insipid!

When Farragut was told of the torpedoes in the way of his ships, if he had

said: *Never mind the torpedoes, go ahead!* that would have been great. What he did say was: "*Damn the torpedoes, go ahead!*" and that was brave—sublime.

Of course, the opposite extreme of under-statement may be used as effectively by a genius as the most intense expletive. Admiral Dewey at the battle of Manila affords us a good example of this: "*You may fire when you are ready, Gridley.*" There was the suppressed force of a volcano in that phrase. It was splendid, ominous. It was the calm before the blast.

A wise man was in a position of vast power. He had a keen sense of humor and was renowned for his courage. He disliked the grotesque and abhorred shams. He stood for a great deal himself that was strong, honorable and just; and he believed that everybody and everything should likewise stand for something sensible, at least, or give way.

He caused the motto: "In God we trust" to be left off our newly minted coins. He knew, as others know, that during the downward months of the year 1907 that motto on our currency was less appropriate and far more sacrilegious than would be the famous Kentucky phrase which ends in "highwater."

Surely, if it is advisable for a virtuous nation to iterate its trust in God on its commercial counters, it might as well repeat on them the assurances of its stand for the "square deal"—its honest intent, and pledge to redeem its promises, "In spite of hell and highwater," as they say in Kentucky. Seriously, a motto of any kind on a coin is absurd. It repeats itself so often in the pockets of the *few*, and so seldom and tersely in the pockets of the *many*, that it loses all meaning. "In God we trust" on coins to the rich is ridiculous—it is a joke. To the poor it is pathetic—it is like the

far-away look in the dying eyes of a starving man—it means too much and too little. One trouble is, that too much reiteration smacks of weakness. It is like the ceaseless "Katy did" and "Katy didn't." It soon becomes meaningless and foolish. The over-use of stimulants is depressing. Too many intensives, or intensives too often repeated, are sure to destroy their effect.

We all applaud the hero who, under desperate odds and overwhelming conditions, is called upon to surrender and stoutly replies: "Damned if I will!" And we all despise the weakling who, on every slight occasion, makes use of the same phrase.

Strong words of the wise and great become as milk and water in the mouths of the weak and foolish—an imitation—a worthless counterfeit. The stress of the moment and the strong man—the hour and the hero—plant curses among the

stars—sow intensives over the heavens to be reflected in all human speech. The same words without the force back of them, and without the occasion fit to give them birth, are disgusting vulgarisms as nauseous as they are senseless. Expletives properly used are never cheapened; the great occasion is not sufficiently recurrent, nor are strong men sufficiently numerous to weaken their effect, or destroy their force.

The sturdiest character that my childhood knew, was wont to exclaim when surprised by some hideous abomination, or vexed into unusual anger: "Hell and scissors!" And I am sure that I never heard anything more eloquent, and I think that I never heard anything more holy in human speech.

For an expletive to remain forceful, it must take on the local coloring of a strong personality, which somehow gives it birthright. It must seem to be original—it

must seem to be warranted, or it must not be often repeated.

Human speech abounds in a variety of expletives. Some are used only for emphasis and others for euphemism. Some express energy, assurance; others are cumulative in effect—some express clearness and seek to make a truth seem doubly true, or "assurance doubly sure." Many are unjustifiable locutions and redundant. There is the expletive usage of synergetic words which multiply the stress of an idea. Examples are not lacking. We have in daily use, "might and main," "honor bright," "as sure as heaven," "many a time and oft," "hue and cry," "receipt and acknowledge," "acknowledge and confess," "bequeath and convey," "well and good," "true as gospel," and "safe and sane."

On the occasion of Henry W. Grady's address before the Boston Merchants' Association, he "became the lion of the

hour, fêted by fashion and showered with attentions from the Hub's most conservative social circle. At an evening reception given to him at one of the most exclusive homes in aristocratic Beacon Street, when the editor was making his departing *devoir* the hostess pleaded: 'Now, Mr. Grady, please do say something original. My other guests have all said, 'I've had a most delightful evening,' or 'I've enjoyed myself exceedingly,' or something equally trite and stupid. I expect something better from you.' Grady placed his hand over his heart in cavalier fashion and with the most courtly bow of which he was capable he declared with great earnestness, 'Madam, I have had one hell of a time.' Not even a suggestion of surprise disturbed the repose of her patrician features as his hostess promptly replied in tones of perfect breeding, 'Mr. Grady, I am damned glad of it.'''

Finally, Poetry is the rich field of intensives. Shakspere grew the finest and most varied crop in the history of mankind.

# VARIATIONS IN WORD-MEANINGS

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EVERY word is born with a meaning; its determination is precise; it is the symbol of a definite idea —the shadow of concrete substance, in one case—the memory of the shadow, in another.

A nascent word may be called a cameo of thought carved from sound. For a time it is fixed. If the word is the name of a concrete thing, it represents to the senses some striking attribute, or supposed attributes, of the thing. If, on the other hand, the word is an abstract term, it conveys the impression of some property or quality common to two or more things.

It follows that concrete terms precede the abstract, and that both in the beginning are of precise and inflexible definition. This rigidity of definition is maintained so long as the word stimulates the conception to one degree of intensity and to one scope. But as human knowledge is the subject of change, which may be likened to growth, the attributes of a thing are revealed more and more, until the number of their possible relations comes to an end. And since conception fluctuates as a tide, so to say, it follows that the original meaning of a word speedily becomes inadequate on the one hand, and shifted on the other.

Moreover, as knowledge of a thing increases, its supposed attributes usually decrease, while its relatively few real qualities become more apparent and seem to increase in number. The original meaning of many words, therefore, soon becomes modified; in some instances, its

falsity bears it down—in others, its uselessness kills it; but more often, the word withdraws itself from its former connotation to embrace a wider meaning, or else changes its meaning altogether.

Thus we see in a great number of words the process of change in meaning, which can be followed clearly step by step. For example: *Damp* originally meant wet, humid, moist; and it still has that meaning; but it has also acquired additional meaning by the process of association, because the condition of *dampness* is so often accompanied with *chilliness*. Hence the idea of *cold* is associated with the word *damp*. From this added meaning came the metaphor: "*dampening* one's ardor"—that is to say, *cooling* it; and so on to the word *damper*, that which shuts off the draft of a stove, which bears no reference whatever to the original meaning of the word *damp*.

*Dry*, in a similar manner, has become modified in meaning when applied to certain wines.

*Street* once meant "a paved way with or without houses"; it means at present a road, paved or not, bordered with houses.

*Impertinent* primarily indicated that which was irrelevant, but gradually came to mean intrusive, insolent, meddlesome and unmannerly.

*Gentleman* at first signified a man born in a certain social class or rank; after a while it meant a man whose happy surroundings were such as usually belonged to one in that station of life. Later the term implied, to the vulgar at least, a man who lived without labor; again, it was applied to a man whose conduct and outward appearance generally were supposed to belong to one born and bred in high

social position; and at last, the word *gentleman* means nothing, or at best, it is synonymous with the word *snob*.

*Loyalty* is another word that has gone through various vicissitudes of meaning: from "fair, open dealing and fidelity to engagements," it came to signify merely fidelity to the throne, and lastly, to embrace faithfulness in friendship. So, too, have the words *only* and *alone* been confused; and *salt*, a term formerly given to sodium chloride only, is no longer applied to that substance alone.

*Oil* is another notable example. This word at one time meant merely olive oil; but now it is applied to any number of substances having some superficial quality in common with it.

*Pagan*. *Pagus* was the name of a village or settlement; hence, *paganus* meant a villager or semi-countryman;

but when Christianity spread over the Roman Empire, the inhabitants of the cities, quite naturally, were the first to be converted, while the great mass of the country people, or *pagans*, adhered to their ancient divinities. Thus this association between *pagan* and a believer in "heathen divinities," altered the meaning of the word until it became a reproach, and at last an epithet meaning merely a heathen.

We find, in like manner, many words which were formerly used to express general characteristics, restricted to special things. *Arsenic* is one of these. This word was derived from a Greek term "which was an ancient epithet applied to those natural substances which possessed strong and acrimonious properties." So, as orpiment (arsenious sulphide) was known as a powerful poison, its dominant ingredient was called *arsenic.*

*Verbena* was once a general term given to all plants which, being used in sacrificial rites, were held to be sacred. But from this general application, the term was restricted to the one plant, of which there are over eighty varieties. At last *verbena* came to be the vulgar name of one particular plant. Likewise, the word *vitriol* was formerly applied to any transparent, crystalline body (*vitrum*, glass).

*Opium* is another word which primarily meant any juice; but which has become restricted to the juice of the poppy.

*Elaterium*, according to Hippocrates, signified "various internal applications, especially purgatives of a violent and drastic nature." Now the word is applied exclusively to the dried sediment from the juice of the squirting cucumber.

*Ecclesia* meant assembly; *bishop*, over-

seer; *deacon*, administrator; *sacrament*, vow of allegiance; *evangelium*, good tidings.

*Physician* (naturalist) came to mean "a healer of diseases, because, until a comparatively late period, medical practisers were the only naturalists"; just as *clerc* (*clericus*) signified a scholar; since, at a certain period, members of the clergy were about the only scholars; hence, *clerc* naturally came to designate an ecclesiastic. Such illustrations as these could be multiplied indefinitely.

We find diversity to be a powerful element in causing variations in word-meanings. The common experience of mankind proves that no two persons are constituted alike. Individual conception varies from a trifling shade to great and complex differences. No two experiences are precisely the same. No two view-

points are exactly equal. The various qualities of a thing never impress two persons alike for any considerable time. The relative importance of one characteristic differs from another according to the mind impressed. The receptive faculty, unconsciously, is strongly selective of impressions; and the different attributes of an object receive different groupings by each individual. So that no one term is defined for any length of time exactly the same in the conception of two or more persons; and while the definitive differences may at first be little more than mere shades of impress, these shades deepen by habit, environment and experience until they become more and more pronounced through generations of men.

When we add to this the influence of diversity in natural capability, grades of intellect and culture, it is not difficult to see clearly why word-meanings change,

and why they must continue to change through an immense period of time. For language must serve the users of language; and so long as the overwhelming majority of language-users sees the properties of things vaguely through dim light and shifting shadow—and while it conceives even less of the origin of these properties—the meanings of words must necessarily accommodate themselves to usage.

Not until definite knowledge becomes more general and conception less fluctuating, will it be possible to form perfect definitions of words which shall have lasting and fixed values. Theory must conform to subject-matter, and science must sweep away the débris.

And lastly, be it said that degeneration of the English tongue is aided materially by a large and growing number of uneducated writers, together with a horde of "professionals," who succeed admir-

ably in disrupting our speech. Very many of these folk are woefully ignorant of the instrument they misuse. By example they legitimize, as it were, countless vulgarisms. Through suggestion they sow broadcast, into the minds of the unlettered, vicious corruptions of speech, depriving English of many valuable bearers of clear thought.

The greater the tendency shown by word-meanings to change and shift, the stronger is the reason why every intelligent linguist should strive to use terms of unmistakable meaning. Every word should express its meaning perfectly, and every fact should be precisely paralleled by a word; otherwise language cannot serve its full purpose.

Not that the daily tongue of a people should be fixed, as is the case, in a way, with the descriptive technical language of this or that science; but the terminology should fit the facts of daily rele-

vance. For the exact nomenclature of science is no more important than a clear general terminology.

# STYLE

# STYLE

STYLE is more easily recognized than defined. It is the subtlest element of expression, and may be termed the purely personal in art. This is affirmed by the French, who say: "The style is the man"; and by Herbert Spencer, who declares it to be *organic*.

As relating to letters, style dwells rather more in the manner of using words than in the words themselves. It is convenient to speak of it as the soul of thought—the personeity of ideas—the picture of mental process—the atmosphere of feeling—the tongue of sentiment. It is fitly described, in general, as strong or weak, smooth or rough, light or heavy, spirited or nervous, beautiful and fine, or ugly and coarse. It is essentially

complex; for it is composed of many qualities.

A very important element of good style is fitness; and it requires an artist to understand the difficulty in altogether suiting the style to the subject. The propriety of association is not doubted; but few persons are able to encompass it, since the difficulties of adjustment are hard to overcome. It is plain enough that a light, jocular style would ill become a treatise on mathematics; nor would clearness alone, which is so essential in a dissertation on science, lend itself to romance, which requires color and adornment to heighten effects. A similar truth applies to architecture: The temple is not built like the cottage, nor is the palace like the jail; however like may be the resemblance of the inmates of both. So the style of a comic story should differ from that of a funeral oration, although it does not always do so.

A presidental address intended to influence the votes of a labor organization might, on occasion, smack a little of Gaelic, but it should never savor too much of a sermon; that is to say, it should not be too humorous, considering who is the natural butt of the joke. Comedy should not borrow boldness from the ode, pathos from tragedy, nor metaphor from the epic. Language varies according to circumstance. The language of science is not easily comprehended by the average person. The same applies to art and to other specialized divisions of effort. In science, a clear, strong style is appropriate; but in artistic literature there should be agreeable qualities which charm the reader and hold his attention as much by the beauty of expression as by the beauty of thought. Thus a striving after subtle shades and delicate effects is not only legitimate, but essential, on occasion, to good style. In plain words,

every kind of execution demands a style to fit it.

Besides fitness, clearness and beauty supported by strength are necessary to good style. The first purpose of style, as of language, should be clearness of expression; and almost equally with this come strength and beauty. The neglect of any one of these qualities mars the style; for apart from being necessary, they overlap each other. For example, beauty is never wholly lacking in clearly expressed thought.

It is said that style cannot be taught. This, I think, is partly a mistake. Not that one may be taught to be master of style; but that his style may be vastly improved by culture, is true without doubt. An uncultivated mind may produce an admirable style. From the same mind, under the influence of culture, would issue an elegant style. The personal element is largely important; and

the essentials of good style are many —several are innate: the faculty of choosing apt words, of evolving fresh metaphor, of combining variety with beauty and clearness, and the ability to season all with euphony.

In one person, the quality of unconscious imitation may produce a better style than much cultivation; while the same may not be at all true of another. But generally speaking, nothing else is so helpful in this respect as broad culture, which is opposed to special culture. By this is meant, that merely the studying of grammar and rhetoric will do little in itself for the building up of a worthy style. More than one subject must be studied, to the end that from a well-stored brain, used to independent thought, comes the unconscious formation of style. The things we do unconsciously are the things we do best.

While style concerns itself more with

manner than with the matter of words, these are, nevertheless, important. A perfect understanding of individual words is necessary. Words bear delicate relations to one another. They possess that which is similar to color, to tones and half-tones; they produce the high-lights and shadows of sound. They must be thrown into well-constructed sentences which are logical, which contain the hint of rhythm and the faint spirit of alliteration. A sentence, moreover, should never leave a reader in doubt. Sentences should vary in length, while the perspective of the whole should have artistic trappings of speech in sufficient amount to hold the attention, but not enough to obscure the meaning. In a word, the value of thought aids the effect of style, just as style heightens the effect of thought.

In these days purity of language is decried by many English writers. The

use of idiomatic words, and what might be termed native construction, are not so much insisted upon as formerly. This is not surprising in such a language as ours, which makes large drafts upon foreign languages and has made them for so long a time. Changes are inevitable in a living language, and this is not an unreasonable change. There are those who plead for even a freer introduction of foreign words and phrases. Whatever one may think of the propriety of restricting this introduction, the effort to do so will fail. It may be looking a long way ahead to prophesy that at some time but one language will be spoken by all the people of earth; and yet no prophecy could be based on more certain grounds. The signs are already well-marked, indicating that eventually only one language will be spoken, and that tongue will be an amalgamated tongue. The process of amalgamation has been

going on from time immemorial; and a vast deal of progress is apparent. But the increasing facilities for intercourse between all the inhabitants of the globe assures to the process of amalgamation of tongues a greater rapidity in the coming centuries than there has been through those of the past. At the present rate at which our language is spreading, it is not hazardous to assume that English will be the basis upon which all other languages will meet to form one. The probability is increased almost to a certainty, when we stop to note how well English is adapted to this amalgamating process. Foreign words, like foreign blood, soon become part of us. The tendency is to appropriate such as suit our purposes best. There is no stemming the tide in this direction—the best that can be done is to exercise a reasonable conservatism in the choice of foreign words. The good should be accepted

and made over into English with little ado; and their aptness should govern their selection. That is to say, words should parallel material facts in prose composition. In poetry a greater freedom is allowable, not so much in the employment of new words, for they rarely lend themselves to poetic themes, nor yet in foreign words which are stiff upon early acquaintance; but rather in the absolute and pictorial parts of speech, many of which are archaic.

In prose, good style avoids the unusual and excludes verboseness. First, for the sake of clearness; and second, to avoid the appearance of stiltedness. The suggestion of vanity breaks the continuity of thought. Mannerisms arrest attention. An undue use of foreign words suggests a poverty of language, which is offensive and antagonistic to wholesome style.

Good words should be chosen, and a word cannot be good that is not precise.

Good style avoids words of loose meaning. It also abhors superfluities, incongruities, duplications of meaning and defects of construction. It has long been noticeable that the writers who think clearly and with precision are those who use words of definite meaning and appropriate bearing. Accuracy in thinking seems to be necessary to clear writing. Words are faultily used which fail to express fully the ideas intended. Mere similarity in meaning will not do; neither should they express more than the intent of the utterer. Precision, therefore, is essential to good style. Looseness of expression is as bad as ill-fitting garments. Moreover, the words should never suggest a wavering apprehension. Good style needs the strength that comes from a fixedness of purpose and unswering diction—a certain directness which is parallel to a noble attribute of moral conduct. Furthermore, that a style may be free

from blemish, it must not concern itself with too much at one time: it must avoid diffuseness. Conception becomes clouded when the mental process is forced to deal with two or more things at the same time. Ideas should be treated singly and in sequence; otherwise they are not seen clearly, and no power of multiplied words is sufficient to render them so. It is a safe rule to follow: the fewer the words used to express a purpose, the better the style.

Nothing else is so important to good style as good judgment, for this must determine, after all, every nicety within its scope. In some instances, over-precision is offensive because it smacks of conceit, and depreciates the reader's understanding. There are some subjects that do not lend themselves to precise treatment; they demand broad touches which suggest rather than point out. In such cases the greatest possible care should

be exercised in the choice of words; otherwise the result will be vulgar on the one hand, or not understandable on the other. The greatest nicety is required in suggesting, where telling would be common and inartistic.

Many writers are too much given to a parade of words. Their ideas are lost in gaudy colors, or lessened by pomp. There is no excuse for saying, for instance, The Great General, The Master Poet, The Mighty Genius and Judge of Art; when meaning, respectively, Napoleon, Shakspere, and Aristotle, unless it is clearly understood to whom these titles refer.

Again, the injudicious employment of synonyms is confusing; but skilfully used, they serve a high purpose in art. With a full knowledge of their differences in shades of meaning, they may be used as a painter applies his colors. One word supplies the defect of another. Where

one is weak another is strong; and where one is dim another adds lustre. Contrasts are struck—tone is maintained, and lo! cathedral chimes pour forth their harmony. Each word then adds its worth to the perfect whole. The picture is complete. But if the synonymous words are used carelessly, the picture is marred —it becomes a daub.

In the world of letters there are wide and delicate differences in style, just as there are in individuals who write. Yet there is a standard of correct style, as there is of morals. And while morals may be said to depend somewhat on geographical location and the "spirit of the times" in one century as differing from the morals of other places and epochs, yet through the ages there is a standard of ethics which, in the main, differs not among the peoples of earth, especially in periods not enormously separated. So we find the underlying

principles in literature paralleled by certain characteristics of individuals. And as environment affects the style of one, it also sways that of the other.

Besides this, the quality of imitation which affects in a small way the style of a people from time to time, is owing to a fondness to *seem* rather than a desire to *be*. This accounts for the grotesque. Again, there are tricks of style just as there are mannerisms of speech or action; but the artist and thinker do not need to have recourse to these. Such things are blemishes to a noble style.

What Mr. Blair calls "copiousness" of style was much in vogue a few centuries back. At present, English writers have swung toward the opposite extreme, and instead of a copious style, affect rather a lean or stingy one. The copious style, if not overdone, lends itself admirably to the expression of grace and

beauty; but as all things become wearisome when pressed to the extreme, this, too, may readily lead us astray.

Affectation is deadly to a beautiful style—nothing fits it better than sincerity. The importance of style can hardly be overrated. For its influence is almost as marked as the thought it conveys. Above all, style must not antagonize the spirit of a tongue. English lends itself to copiousness and French to the epigrammatic. In one, grace is the most noticeable quality, just as the scintillating quality inheres in the other.

To sum up:

All good work depends upon style, which may be simple or elevated. The ideas must be accurate, the language should be approximately pure, and there should be propriety of expression. Heroic language ill becomes the neatherd. Indeed, the greatest defect in style is the sinning against genius, rather than

the breaking of rules. And it should be remembered that style is weak when unrelieved by ingenuity of expression; that flowery style is agreeable rather than profound; that deficiency of soul is deadly to style, and that sterile ideas render it cold.

# DISTINCTIONS IN WORD-MEANINGS

## DISTINCTIONS IN WORD-MEANINGS

MENTAL phenomena could not exist without physical phenomena. There is no real chasm between "spiritual" and physical things; what seems to be a mysterious gulf is the fog of ignorance, for the most part, of distinction in word-meanings.

By some mental process, not yet defined, many words have come into being which serve, apparently, the sole purpose of confusion. These sprites of Babel have no counterparts in fact, sense or reason. They are not justified by any characteristic of the physical world. They belong essentially to the realm of phantoms. They may be called, also, the fungi of disorder, or the children

of phantasy; or, even, the spume-waifs of crazy psychic currents, which obscure the thoughts of men with the froth-words of unreality.

The statement will bear scrutiny, I think, that every legitimate word is born of parallel physical and mental phenomena. For a word to be useful it must *mean something.* The more definite its meaning, the more useful it is. Every physical phenomenon should be accurately reflected in a corresponding mental phenomenon. A word is the most available mirror that man has found to reflect upon the mind the image of a fact. There are distinctions between facts. There should be corresponding distinctions between the words that connote the facts. Define a word. Is it justified by fact? That is the real test. Language is a loose contrivance of man; and words are, in too many instances, unfortunate; they fail to

show the distinctions that they should represent. It will be one of the most important tasks of the future, to select for use the words which are fit, by their inherent power, to portray definite facts, and to weed out such as are not. It is most likely that this will be done by the slow process of devolution and regeneration in the evolution of language.

Physical facts have their distinctions; and words, which are parallel facts, must conform to these distinctions. Without this, language, in which thought naturally finds its fullest and most logical expression, must fail to perform perfectly its clear purpose. Usage and custom are blind and diffusive where the ultimate object of language is considered. Every distinction between words is unjustified, unless there is back of it a distinction in fact. Superfluous words should be ejected, and the size of dictionaries, as a consequence, lessened.

Just as there is *somewhat* similar to parallelism between mental process and physical process, so there is parallelism between the physical organism and its environment; or, in the words of Professor Simon E. Patten: "between economics and biology . . . . The distinctions in organisms run parallel to those in the environment, and those of the one may be expressed in terms of the other." There is no reason why the ingenuity of man should fail in the making of his words to fit their distinctions as accurately as need be. The method of induction alone is insufficient to do this; for it will be seen that language is governed by primary laws, even as is life. Purely inductive studies must fail to produce a suitable vocabulary. What real distinctions do many psychologic terms indicate? Their very vagueness makes it almost impossible to write a clear paragraph on a

subject in psychology. And why is this? Because the physiologic distinctions are not tallied by the psychologic distinctions of words. To quote again from Dr. Patten: "Every mental fact has some physical expression. The test, therefore, of the reality of a psychic distinction is its correspondence to a physical difference, and this test should be applied in defining terms."

Many examples might be cited showing the confusion of word-meanings, or lack of proper distinction in their employment. A few will do:

It is a matter of well nigh daily occurrence to hear the words *faculty*, *talent*, *capacity* and *ability* confused. The distinctions in the meanings of these words are sometimes neglected by persons of education. *Faculty* (*facultas*, *facilitas*, *facio*, to do) implies a natural gift of a certain kind to a certain end; and

should be used in a restricted sense, as more or less common to all: as, one's *faculties*—that is to say, functions of sense. *Talent* (*talentum*) is also a natural gift which varies greatly among different persons—some having a *talent* for music, others for painting and what not. *Ability* (*habilitas*) signifies, in general, the power to do, and "always supposes something able to be done," while *capacity* (*capacitas*) imports "the abstract quality of being able to receive or hold." So are the words *able*, *capable*, *capacious* too often used carelessly. Two persons may be *able* to read, and one of the two *capable* of reading Greek; while the third may have a more *capacious* mind than either of the other two and be *unable* to do that which the others do easily. *Act* (*actum*), *action* (*actio*) and *deed* are not synonyms. *Act* signifies the power exerted which renders the thing done;

*action*, doing; *deed*, simply the work performed. An *act* may be public or private, collective or individual. A *deed* is always personal—while "an *action* may consist of more *acts* than one," embracing more or less complex causes and consequences. These are the distinctions which no careful linguist overlooks.

Again, to *aggravate, irritate, provoke, exasperate, tantalize:* To *aggravate* is so frequently misused that the infinitive is in danger of losing its meaning. *Aggravate* (*aggravatus*) means to add to; *irritate* (*irritatus*), to excite, to annoy, to thwart; *provoke* (*provoco*), "to challenge or defy," to awaken anger; *exasperate* (*exasperatus*), to roughen the feelings to an unusual degree of anger; *tantalize* (*Tantalus*), to raise hopes in order to frustrate them. *Aim, object, end: Aim* (*aestimo*) is the mental intent; *object* (*objectus*) inheres in the thing;

while "the *end* is that which follows or terminates any course or proceeding." *All* signifies the *whole* number of units. "*All* is collective; *every* is singular or individual; *each* is distributive." *Mortal, deadly, fatal:* The bite of a serpent may be *deadly;* the thrust of a sword, *mortal;* a step in the wrong direction, *fatal.* To *have* and to *possess* indicate distinctive differences. To *have* implies indefinite ownership: to *have* in mind, within reach, in control. To *possess* is to *have* definite ownership of: a cashier, for instance, may *have* much money at his disposal, while the same money is *possessed* by his employer.

# SOME FURTHER DISTINCTIONS

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*Notice*, to *mention*. It is of common, almost of daily, occurrence to see *mention* and *notice* used indifferently as synonymous words. Whatever may be the plea for expansion and elasticity of our tongue, certainly no one would urge its confusion as a means of growth. Language, as everything else, grows in accordance with principle or law. We express our ideas best, when we make use of the distinctions which exist between words more or less synonymous. *Notice* and *mention* "imply the act of calling things to another person's mind," and in that sense only are they synonymous. If a thing is *mentioned*, it is brought to one's attention in no uncertain manner; but if it is *noticed* merely, the act may have

been incidental, and is usually brought to mind indirectly.

*Illusion* and *delusion.* There are very few of us who have not been, at some time or another, *deluded;* that is to say, allured by deceit to deviate from right into error. There is nothing imaginary about that. On the other hand, those of us who get our ideas of the ". . . form divine" through poetry and the robes and waddings of modern fashion, awake on some calm, gray dawn to the fact that we have suffered from an *illusion*—often optical. In all *illusions* the imagination plays a leading rôle. Thomson said:

> "While the fond soul,
> Wrapt in gray visions of unreal bliss,
> Still paints the illusive form."

*Puerile.* One need not be a great Latinist to know that *puer* means boy;

and that *puerile*, therefore, means simply boyish, and is not synonymous either with *youthful* or *juvenile*.

*Writer*, *author:* There is a world of difference between the two. In this age it is not necessary for an *author* to be a *writer*. He may talk into a recording phonograph, or better still, if he be not married, into the shell-like ear of a pretty type-writist. Our daily, weekly and monthly publications convince us with overwhelming *prima facie* evidence that the majority of *writers* are in no sense *authors*. Crabb says that, "Poets and historians are properly termed *authors* rather than *writers*." But Mr. Crabb was deficient in the sense of humor.

*Word* and *term*. Let us not be dogmatic. Good authority has it that *word* and *term* are not necessarily synonymous.

I am sorry if that is true. *Word* and *term* should mean the same thing. Every word of a non-barbaric tongue should have its boundary and specific signification. Usage should limit the meaning of a *word*—and generally does—as accurately as science fixes a *term*. But it is as well to have a change of words occasionally as it is to have a change of clothes.

*Whole, entire, complete.* A *whole*-hearted person is one, properly speaking, from whose heart nothing has been taken. There are many such in this world. The heart, as it were, may have been broken into fragments; but so long as all the parts remain together on the premises, and unconfiscated, the individual may still aver, with whatever arrogance he please, that his heart is *whole*. But let some demure divorcée prove a common-law marriage, and the honorable Court will hold that the heart

is no longer *entire*, since it is an axiom in law that in union there is division; and that, thereafter, it requires two to make one *complete*.

*Way*, *manner*, *method*, *mode*, *course*, *means*.

"Strait is the gate and narrow is the *way*."
—Mat. vii. 14.

The *ways* of Heaven are dark and intricate.
—*Addison*.

This is not very encouraging to the sufferers in this world who look Heavenward for joy. He who travels a strange *way* would do well to resort to a good *manner* and a safe *method*; and the *mode* of travel may require close and continuous attention. *Course* and *means* are used mostly to designate the *way* of moral conduct.

All impediments in fancy's *course*
Are motives of more fancy.
—*Shakspere*.

Yet, by your gracious patience,
I will a round unvarnished tale deliver
Of my whole *course* of love.
—*Ibid.*

All your sophisters cannot produce anything better adapted to preserve a rational and manly freedom than the *course* that we have pursued. —*Burke.*

How modern is this:

Get money; still get money, boy,
No matter by what *means.*
—*Ben Jonson.*

And this:

Get place and wealth,—if possible, with grace;
If not, by any *means* get wealth and place.
—*Pope.*

The most wonderful things are brought about in many instances by *means* the most absurd and ridiculous.—*Burke.*

*Strenuous.* Theodore Roosevelt, whose name gains nothing by a title, gave this word a vogue which it never had before. It is an old theory, that the mind instinctively uses words which re-

flect very subtly its own characteristics. It does not require vast experience in one to recognize a *mollycoddle* by his speech. What a veritable stench are the words of an unclean mind! How crystal-pure and sweet is the language of wisdom and righteousness! How plainly, as a paradigm, is this

A Dude's Description of Life

"Life's just a hollow bubble, don't yeh know—
Just a painted piece of trouble, don't yeh know—
You come to earth to cry, you grow older and you sigh;
Older still and then you die, don't yeh know.

"It's all a horrid mix, don't yeh know,
Business, love and politics, don't yeh know;
Clubs and parties, cliques and sets,
Fashions, follies, cigarettes, don't yeh know.

"So you worry through the day, don't yeh know,
In a sort of kind of way, don't yeh know—
You are hungry, you are fed; some few things are done and said—
You are tired—go to bed—don't yeh know.

"Society is dress, don't yeh know,
And a source of much distress, don't yeh know:
To determine what to wear, to make your face look fair,
And how to part your hair, don't yeh know.

"Love! ah yes; you meet a girl, don't yeh know;
And you get in such a whirl, don't yeh know—
You get down on the floor and implore and adore—
And it's all a beastly bore, don't yeh know."

Surely, this is not the language of the truculent spirit who can give the lie direct, when need be; and who can read the heart of the grizzly through the rift of the rifle's sight. The strenuous paladin—the sturdy trouncer, wielding the "big stick" alike over a turbid Senate and the bald heads of thieving railway manipulators—would scorn such rhyming jargon. Strenuous are the words he would use, and well, because they are wedded to an undaunted, untamed spirit.

We find *strenuous* used too often, however, by "undesirable citizens" in the sense of *bold.* This is a mistake. *Bold* implies only half the meaning. "*Strenuous* supporters of any opinion are always strongly convinced of the truth of that which they support, and warmly impressed with a sense of its importance" (Crabb). Hence a difference of opinion seems to them, rightly enough, "a lie," and righteously "undesirable."

*Tale, story.* There are more *tales* in currency than there are *stories;* and probably will be as long as the inventive instinct remains strong in man. A *story* may not be true—a *tale* never is.

> And often did beguile her of her tears,
> When I did speak of some distressful stroke
> That my youth suffered. My *story* being done,
> She gave me for my pains a world of sighs.
>
> —*Shakspere.*

Let not the heavens hear these tell-*tale* women
Rail on the Lord's anointed.
—*Ibid.*

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several *tale*,
And every tale condemns me for a villain.
—*Ibid.*

Herodotus is present at the Olympic games, and, like an old woman to children, recites his narratives, or rather *tales* to the assembled Greeks.
—*Voltaire*, PHILOSOPHIC DICTIONARY.

*Spurt, spout.* There is the same difference in meaning between these words as there is between a perpetual candidate *spouting* tiresome platitudes, and a "fire-alarm" politician *spurting* nonsense. By comparison we welcome the *spurter*, because the *spouter* never gives us a respite.

To *speak, say, converse, talk, tell, discourse.*

Ships at sea may *speak* to one another far beyond the range of voice. If the *talk* of some persons could only be

pushed back beyond the horizon of hearing the world would be happier. Thunder and lightning *speak* to the savage—the old woman *talks* to us from the chimney-corner—the creditor *says* we are in his debt—the articulation of lovers is sweet *converse*—and for dry, heavy *discourse* one should listen to a professor when he "school-masters" English. As a people, we are proud of our distinguished individuals who can *tell* lies without so much as batting an eyelid. The distinctions existing betwixt these words are not remarkably subtle.

Words that weep and tears that *speak*.
—*Cowley*.

The first duty of a man is to *speak*, that is his chief business in this world; and *talk*, which is the harmonious speech of two or more, is by far the most accessible of pleasures.—*R. L. Stevenson*.

First *say* to yourself what you would be; and then do what you have to do.—*Epictetus*.

*Tell* it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon.—2 Sam. i. 20.

With thee *conversing* I forget all time,
All seasons, and their change,—all please alike.
—*Milton.*

A gentleman, nurse, that loves to hear himself *talk*, and will speak more in a minute than he will stand to in a month.—*Shakspere.*

Miss not the *discourse* of the elders if you are troubled with insomnia.

*Abominable, detestable* and *execrable* arise in a climax describing that which is bad. The first expresses strong aversion; the second, "hatred and revulsion"; the third, "indignation and horror." In the denouncing of enemies, justice demands that these words should never be used as synonyms. The list of condemnatory adjectives is not large enough as it is to suit the requirements of individuals, on occasion.

The newspapers! Sir, they are the most villainous, licentious, *abominable*, infernal!—Not that I ever read them! No, I make it a rule never to look into a newspaper.—*Richard Brinsley Sheridan.*

"The rantankerous Senator is one of the most *detestable* hypocrites in public life."
(. . . . . In private conversation.)

Whence and what art thou, *execrable* shape?
—Shade of Milton to the Shadow of "Our Chauncey."

Many of these examples taken at random from Crabb's *English Synonymes* are scarcely more striking than hundreds of others. If they serve to emphasize the contention that a careful distinction between the meanings of more or less synonymous English words is essential to clear expression, they do well.

NOTE: See "THE WORTH OF WORDS" (Hinds, Noble and Eldredge, New York) for further reference—words arranged alphabetically.

# THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE

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WHO has not speculated on the origin of language; and who has said the final word on the subject? The exact solution of the question seems to be a long way off.

A few gentlemen have written sensibly on the origin of language; a good many more have needlessly exploited their ignorance in discussing the matter; while some reverential souls have thought to please God by ascribing to Him the invention of human speech.

This might be called the *ripe apple theory;* that is to say, God put language into man's breath as He might have put a ripe apple into his mouth. Happily, the day of the *ripe apple theory* is past. There are other theories as

to the origin of speech; some of them are not now seriously considered; some others are reasonable in parts; but the only one that seems wholly probable may be said to be the *evolutionary theory.*

We have all heard of the "bow-wow," "ding-dong," "pooh-pooh" theories, as well as of the highly intellectual "goo-goo" theory, invented by Professors Greenough and Kittredge. Let us hope that it scarcely required their combined intellects to bring it forth.

With all due respect to the authors of the various theories, but especially to the reverential souls who have tried so ingeniously to flatter God, presumably for the good of others, let us consider the theory of the evolutionists, who, in their search after truth, have no "axes to grind" either with gods or men.

It has long been known that all

gregarious animals possess the means of communicating with one another. Their language, in one instance, may be that merely of touch, as is the case with ants. These remarkable little beings converse by means of their antennæ.

It is a curious fact that most animals communicate with one another through vocal sounds. They express their emotions of love, grief, joy, desire, anger, fright, etc., by intonation. In many instances their language is intelligible to human beings. We clearly distinguish between the murmuring, plaintive, nursing-sounds of the mother caring for her young, and the cries of alarm and distress.

I have a very little dog, of the Japanese spaniel family, that has a considerable range of speech. A plaintive little spiral wail calls me out into the hall to put on the light, so that her ladyship may see to ascend the stairs; a sharp, short

"barklet" says: "Open the door!"; a prolonged, rolling bark expresses disapproval (usually) of a visitor; a low, ratchet growl is a warning not to disturb her when she is comfortable; a sort of yelping growl tells a stranger to keep away from her bed, her biscuit or anything else that may be hers; a flute-like sound is a plea; a sharp, quick, strong bark is a sound of alarm; a soft guttural, almost purring, sound tells me as plainly as a woman's words that she loves me, and is very happy with me for the moment. For grief she has tears and lugubrious howls. She produces many other sounds and intonations which are not only expressive, but, on occasion, quite eloquent. She is, indeed, highly accomplished in primitive speech.

Professor Garner, who has been studying African and other monkeys, with the aid of an interesting young woman,

reports from his jungle-cage in the wilds of Africa that he has actually discovered about thirty well-defined substantives in daily use among monkeys. Monkey-talk has long interested mankind; but the discovery of monkey-nouns is new, and all the credit attached to it rightly belongs to Professor Garner.

At all events it is not unreasonable to assume that the language of the lower forms of animals evolved as the animals themselves developed.

Our early progenitors spoke a combined language of gesticulation and vocal intonation. As their minds became more and more active and their affections more developed, they found amusement in gesturing, murmuring and babbling to one another. Then hard-times came to them, even as they fall upon us; but in their day hard-times were rather more dependent upon geological, than upon financial upheavals, as in our

time. They became conscious of a shortage in food-supply—and as food decreased their enemies increased. They were menaced from all sides, and a common danger wrought the golden bonds of closer union. It was then that Socialism made its first notable step. They needed the protection of one another, and had sense enough to avail themselves of it, since neither graft nor jails had yet appeared among them. Combination became the principal instinct of self-preservation; and combination depended upon their language, the growth of which was enormously stimulated thereby. With relative rapidity language passed from one stage of development to another. From the stage of intonation, in which ideas paralleled a chromatic scale, it readily passed to the stage of imitation. This was a great step toward progress. Mental activity increased; social affections developed; necessity, an impellent

shadow, was ever at their shoulder—or, to be more exact, at their stomach. They began to inform one another of danger by imitative sounds, gestures and grimaces. A low growl, a gesture indicative of direction, a savage grimace, said plainly enough: "Look out for an enemy—a wild beast over there!" "To imitate water, they bubbled with their mouths; they grubbed with their hands and pretended to eat, to show that they had discovered roots." The utility of this rude speech was not lost on them, as later developments clearly show. They saw not only utility, but found pleasure in language. This consciousness was the dawn of the third stage of language, which was more "conventional or artificial." Substantives were invented to fit certain objects: certain nouns were given certain sounds. The invention of the adjective and verb was only a step away; "and, lastly,

words which had at first been used for physical objects were applied to the nomenclature of ideas."

Combination had proved an excellent weapon of defense; it was also found equally good for offense. Without language there could be no combination. "Language, therefore, may be considered the first weapon of our species, and was improved, as all weapons would be, by that long, never-ceasing war, the battle of existence."

In the second stage of the development of language—the imitative—we discover the starting-point of art. The young of nearly all animals learn by imitation. Much is accredited to instinct in animals, which should properly be accredited to their instinct of imitation. The individuals of many species imitate one another. "With monkeys this propensity becomes a mania." With man the instinct of imitation is prodigiously de-

veloped. Persons living together in long, intimate association, reflect the characteristics of one another to a noticeable degree. This is well shown both in the conjugal felicity of the fireside, and in the cat-like squabbles of the divorce court. Imitation, "when adroitly managed," becomes an efficient means of education. The savage tries to imitate the things that are new to him. When he sees a strange object, he is seized with two impulses—curiosity and imitation. He draws rough pictures of ships on the sands of the beach; he scratches outlines of animals on rocks, or draws them on barks and skins. This is the birth of art, of sculpture, of picture writing, and of the alphabet itself.

Some time during the career of our primeval ancestors, poetry and music were one. Words were chanted; conversation was rhythmical; music was a language. The *science* of music has been

discovered since, and the *art* of music wonderfully developed; but music still retains some of the essentials of a language, although it ceased to be speech when prose took the place of poetry. At that time poetry and music became, equally with language, separate arts. Previous to that time, "the bard was a minstrel, the minstrel was a bard." With the invention of writing, the art of music was separated from that of poetry. One man no longer "accompanied himself upon the harp." The art of music divided itself into vocal and instrumental. Yet music was a primitive language, and vocal music today bears a striking relation to the language of speech.

Nothing can be much plainer than that musical sounds and gestures—both of which are largely ornamental today—"are relics of the primeval language." Travelers—those who travel really to

see things outside the dusty, monotonous ways which the fools of fashion take and follow—are aware that many peasants and savages still chant their talk. This is especially evident when they are stirred by deep emotion: when subconscious nature harks back to primitive characteristics.

Once in mid-ocean I heard a Polish peasant woman chant her grief; her babe had been thrown overboard by a lunatic. The poor mother sat wrapt in her despair singing her grief, meanwhile swaying her body rhythmically. On the floor beside her stood the empty little shoes that her babe had worn only a few hours before. She scarcely removed her eyes from the pathetic shoes. I shall never forget how that savage, poignant song pierced my heart and made it primitive for the moment: how it aroused within me a storm of savage sorrow.

I was at luncheon when the ship's mighty engines ceased to throb; an uncanny hush fell upon us—a thrill, rather than words, apprised us that a child was overboard; gaiety died—laughter froze on the lips—the ship circled in rough seas—every eye scanned the dark green, graceful, feline, hateful waves. Within an hour the grim ship picked up her course—the throb of the engines' heart resumed—the gay life of the passengers went on as before—a little child was alone with the deep—a mother's wail pierced the gray mists, and her chanting grief was all that was left to her of her babe.

In that hour's quick review passed an epitome of life and history. In the mother's grief a primeval language flowered again, that the bitter fruit of despair might fill her heart—and the agony of that hour left its scar upon more than one soul.

Articulate speech has grown into many rich and glowing languages, wherein all shades of thought have found appropriate voice and term; abstract ideas and delicate emotions blossom and give forth their perfume and beauty to our souls. Just so has the inarticulate speech of music grown into a wide and varied language of sound, wherein poems are sculptured from the air, as tender melodies float around us; good angels from a fairy land soothe all the hurts of day, while alluring elves weave for our brain the soft webs of trance-like dreams.

Music makes the doors of the mind to open on a new world where all is vast and dim; unutterably grand ideas pass before us in organized procession; gigantic shadows throw immeasurable silhouettes against the sky; wondrous hues, drawn from the infra-spectrum, sweep and float before us—only to vanish as strangely as they came, leaving at last

scarcely the shadow of the dream behind. Again, the notes are soft and low, arranged, assorted and combined into the plaintive primal chords that strike all reason dumb—the senses swim in seas of happy languor—"the mind returns and nestles to the heart"—the eyes are filled with tears as the past takes form again, and a voluptuous sadness steals upon the soul, "sweet as the sorrow of romantic youth" when first it bathes in tears.

Somewhere in the dawn-deep wilds of Nature, music was born of passion; it was the speech of love; the wail of grief; the sound of joy. It is perhaps the only element of language which may be called divine. Within its magic circle dwell the sigh and sob, the moan of pain and "caressing murmur of maternal love"; the plaints of supplication; the calls of challenge; the cries of triumph; the songs of mated love, and the dirges for

the dead—all there find voice and echo of being's elusive self.

We do not know, and yet it may be found that immortality exists within the range of music's magic realm. Think of the happiest moment of your life—the most ecstatic moment. Perhaps you were listening to a symphony of Beethoven. You were literally "carried away from yourself": a vulgar idiom of much truth. You were transported; you forgot *self*—forgot all the relations which made you an individual. There was no individual memory—no past—no future; all was a sweet sublimation of the sense of well-being; environment vanished—self disappeared. If there be immortality of soul, perhaps it is of this nature.

It is possible that far away through the future eons of man's development, the soul may turn again to this strange and subtle tongue, as the only worthy

means of converse and expression. As man rises with his aspirations to higher and ever nobler planes of being, it may be that music shall be his sole speech and poetry all his thought.

Perhaps the soul may turn upon high crest
And beat an ebb-tide dream through ways of past;
Perchance the goal lies hidden in the breast
Of some dim day; and heart find hope at last
By turning back to ancient dawn, when first
The budding fancy felt the dear, warm breath
Of waking love, ere creed and crime had curst
The sons of men with hate and death.

Toward the origin of things we can trace a little way backward. We think that we can follow life downward to the early compounds of cyanogen, born amid the flames of inconceivable fury and undenotable heat. Language we can trace back to snarling beasts and crawling things. Science, we believe, was evolved from the early habit of seeking food—a habit which developed

the instinct of curiosity, which in turn unfolded genius. Art was born of the spirit, and the spirit was imitation and imitation was the necessity of learning to eat. And music arose from primeval speech, and the speech was the voice of love, and the love was sexual attraction, and back of the sexual attraction was the vague but strong instinct of propagation before the separation of the sexes, when the Androgynous divinity ruled the world and both male and female were one. Beyond this we do not go; and yet, up to this point, we have traveled only an infinitesimal part of the way as it leads ever backward.

"Why was it so ordered that reason should be born of refrigeration, and that a piece of white-hot Star should cool into a habitable world, and then be sunned into an intellectual *salon*, as the earth will some day be? All that we are doing, and all that we can do,

is to investigate secondary laws; but from these investigations will proceed discoveries by which human nature will be elevated, purified, and finally transformed." And language, the fairest blossom of the soul, shall not have bloomed in vain.

# SOME OLD CELTIC FRIENDS

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*Celtic* is a word that covers a group of allied tongues known as Irish, Gaelic, Welsh, Manx, Breton and, formerly, Cornish. This group has contributed not a few useful words to English—words, many of them, in every-day use. For the most part, they are friends of our childhood—sturdy friends that stick to us through life. Some of the most common of these, with their derivation and cognate forms, follow in alphabetical order, and will be found of interest to many persons whose knowledge of English goes beyond the merely utilitarian usage.

*Babe* has meant an infant for a long time, and has the respectable reputation

of never having meant anything else. It was *babe* and *bab* in M. E., of which the full form was *baban.* Its derivation was from Welsh, Gaelic, Irish and Cornish. Early in its career this sacred word warmed the heart of many tribes and clans. It is spread out now over a great part of earth, and has grown so dear to the people that we find it in the mouths of politicians calling for more. From the lap of the mother to the mouth of the "statesman," hungry for votes, is no great way, but tremendously important.

In Manx we find the cognate words *bab* and *baban,* meaning a babe or child. The diminutive was *maban,* from *máb,* a son—hence our *macs,* since *máb* and *mac* are modified forms of *maqvi,* early Welsh for son.

*Bad,* evil and wicked men and things are older than our era. M. E. had both *bad* and *badde,* and Chaucer his

*badder*, meaning *worse*, which, however, is not from the same root.

*Bald* originally was used in the sense of (1) shining, (2) white, and applied to streaks on the foreheads of animals nominally inferior to man, as, for example, the horse. *Bal*, white streak, etc., was Welsh, and was cognate with *bali* and the Breton *bal*. *Bald* came from Gaelic and Irish. As the men of Britain began to show hairless signs on their pates, presumably after the introduction of the Roman ballet, we read that they were referred to as *balled*. Chaucer sang: "His head was *balled*, and schon as eny glas." M. E. gives us both *balled* and *ballid*, dissyllables.

*Bard*. The original meaning of this word was, most likely, speaker. Poets were not always the meek and timorous beings known to us in our degenerate day. At an early time they were loud and lusty seers not loath to speak. We

find *bardd* in Welsh, *bard* in Irish and Gaelic, *bardh* in Cornish, and in Breton, *barz*.

*Barrow* has long been both verb and substantive. Originally the noun meant a burial mound, a hillock. M. E. gave us *berg*, a hill; Cornish, Welsh and Breton *bar*, a top; and Gaelic *barpa*, a conical heap of stones, a cairn, a barrow. *Barrach*, heaped up. *Barrow*, the verb, from *beran*, to bear, carry—hence an open, placid form of legitimate robbery, since a thing *barrowed* is usually carried away and buried forever. The noun is also used in the sense of a vehicle: a wheel barrow. "A. S. *borh*, a pledge, is derived from the stem of *borg-en*, pp. of *beorgan*, to protect."

*Basket.* Original meaning unaltered. *Basket*, M. E. (Chaucer): derived from Welsh *basged.* Cognates: Cornish, *basced;* Gaelic, *bascaid.*

*Bat.* "He went on a *bat*"—a debauch.

"He's *batty*," in the sense of being not quite sane, are slang phrases in which the use of the word *bat* is unwarranted. Carlyle's version of Nat Lee's "hieroglyphic bat" is just about as sensible:

> "Methinks I see a hieroglyphic bat
> Skim o'er the zenith in a slipshod hat;
> And to shed infants' blood, with horrid strides,
> A damned potato on a whirlwind rides."

The word means (1) a short club or cudgel. M. E. *batte.* It was derived from Irish and Gaelic *bat* and *bata,* a staff, cudgel; Breton *batarag,* a club; (2) a mammal with wings—corrupted from M. E. *bakke.*

*Bauble.* The history of this word tells us that the family-tree of fools is, at least, not an upstartish growth. It also hints darkly at the genealogy of jewelers. The word came from the Celtic, and meant (1) a fool's mace; (2) (derived from the French via Italian meaning)

a trifle, a plaything, a whimwam, a gewgaw, and so forth. Certainly nothing to be encouraged.

*Bicker* probably had a feminine origin, so to speak, in Welsh from *bicra*. Women bickered, pecked and skirmished even in that ancient and honorable tribe. *Bicra*, figuratively, to peck at, a petty dispute.

*Block* has done good service. From the Gaelic *ploc* meaning a round mass, a large clod, a bludgeon with a large head—to *block*, a stump of a tree, it finally came to mean a large piece of wood. In Irish, *ploc* meant a plug, a bung—from *blocan*, a little block. M. E. had *blok*, which came from the Welsh *plock*, a block. Dutch *blok;* Swedish *block;* Danish *blok*.

In modern times it has acquired additional meanings. We speak of a *block* meaning a city "square." In that sense it is perhaps preferable to "square." Naturally, it came to mean an auctioneer's

stand, and has been compounded into *blockhead*, which is a very descriptive word when applied figuratively to many a human being who is, unfortunately, about as sentient and sensible as "a bludgeon with a large head."

*Bludgeon* is thought to be derived from the Irish *blocan*. That the Irish clan should have given us that word is fitting enough. An Irishman without a bludgeon is in undress uniform; with it, he is perfectly accoutred for war, and at ease in polite society. The average New York policeman is a living hark-back. The Gaelic *plocan*, a wooden hammer, beetle, a mallet, is a cognate word.

*Bog*, a piece of soft ground, a quagmire, came from the Irish *bogach*, a morass, or softish (place). The Gaelic *bogan*, a quagmire, was a cognate term.

*Bother* is a comparatively modern word which was probably first used by the inimitable Swift: "My head you bother."

Mr. Swift uses *pother* in the same poem, in the sense of continuous excitement:

> "With every lady in the land
> Soft Strephon kept a *pother;*
> One year he languished for one hand
> And next year for another."

The word is probably derived from the Irish *buaidhirt,* trouble, affliction; *buaidhrim,* I vex, disturb, annoy, distract, madden.

*Brag.* A "gentleman" or "lady" merely exaggerates; a fool or common person is said to *brag.* Just where the difference lies is not easy to see. Of course, *exaggerating* is not necessarily *bragging;* and yet it is a common observation that he who *brags* usually *exaggerates.* He cannot help it. The frame of mind capable of producing a *brag,* a boast, is incapable of refraining from over-statement. Shakspere speaks of the *braggart* in *Much Ado About Nothing*—and we find *braggere* in *Piers*

*Plowman.* The word has at least the respectability of some age. It was derived from Welsh *bragio*, to brag; *breagh*, fine, splendid. It was cognate with Irish *bragaim*, I boast; also with Breton *braga: "Se pavaner,* marcher d'une manière fière, se parer de beaux habits."* It came from the root *bhrag*, to break. English *break*, to *crack*, to boast—an excellent accomplishment!

*Bran.* M. E. gave us *bran*, *bren*, meaning the coats of grains of wheat. The word was derived from Welsh *bran*, husk. It was cognate with Irish *bran*, chaff. In O. F. we find *bren*, bran. It may have come into English through the Breton *brenn*. French *bren*, dung, stinking refuse.

*Brat.* This is one of our most expressive words; it would be difficult indeed to describe some children without it. Originally it meant rag, clout—especially a child's bib or apron, and

* *Pavaner*, "to strut *as the peacock does.*"

finally, a contemptuous name for child. Chaucer uses *brate* for a coarse cloak, rugged mantle. The word came from Welsh *brat*, a rag. The Gaelic *brat*, a mantle, cloak, apron, rag; and Irish *brat*, cloak, mantle, veil; *bratog*, a rag, are cognates.

*Brawl.* Brawling was a pleasant diversion of the Celtic clans. To quarrel, to roar, was a delightful avocation, the art of which has not yet been wholly lost. In M. E. *brawle* meant to quarrel. The word is derived from Welsh *brawl*, which signified a boast; *brol*, a boast, a vaunt; *bragal*, to vociferate. Irish *braighean*, a quarrel; *braigaim*, "I boast, bounce, bully." Welsh *bragal*, "to vociferate"—from which came the word *braggle.*

*Brisk.* Milton uses this word, and it appears in Shakspere's works; but it is rarely used by earlier writers. A very learned American Professor, who knows all about everything and some-

thing besides, asserts that the word was first applied to the lively, quick and nimble flea. However that may be, it was derived from the Welsh *brysg*, quick, nimble, and was cognate with Gaelic *briosg*, "quick, alert, lively." Max Müller says that "The English *brisk*, *frisky*, and *fresh*, all came from the same source." And Mr. Skeat thinks, that "the initial Celtic *b* in this case" might stand "for an older *p*," which would "perhaps" make "*brisk* co-radicate with *fresh*, *frisky*"—good words! "If *brisk* is Celtic, it cannot be cognate with *fresh* and *frisky*."

*Bucket.* M. E. gave us *boket* (Chaucer). It meant "a kind of pail." It was probably derived from A. S. "*buc*, a pitcher. Irish *buicead*, a bucket, a knob, boss; Gaelic *bucaid*, a bucket, also a pustule." Gaelic and Irish gave us "*boc*, to swell. The word *bowl* is of similar formation."

*Bug* is a word that was used originally

in the sense of frightful, terrifying. It was derived from Welsh *bwg*, "a hobgoblin, spectre; *bwgan*, a spectre." Cognates were Irish *puca*, "an elf, sprite" —Gaelic "*bocan*, a spectre, apparition, terrifying object"—Cornish "*bucca*, a hobgoblin, bugbear, scarecrow." Finally *bug* came to be the name given to a disgusting creature, an insect.

*Bugaboo* is *bug* in its original meaning with the Welsh interjection of threatening added to the word—a spectre.

The following *Celtic Friends* might be treated as have been the foregoing, if it were thought well to continue further the dictionary-features of this work:

*Bugbear, bump, bung, burly,*

*Cabin, cart, clock, coax, cob, cobble, cock, cog, coil, cradle, crag, crease, crock, crone, cub, curd, cut,*

*Dad, dagger, darn, dirk, dock, docket, down, drab, drudge, druid, dudgeon, dun, dune,*

*Earnest,*

*Fun,*

*Gag, glen, glib, goggle-eyed, gown, griddle, grounds, gull,*

*Ingle,*

*Jag, job,*

*Kick, knack, knag, knave, knick-knack, knob, knock, knoll, knuckle,*

*Lad, lag, lass, lawn, loop, lubber,*

*Mattock, merry, mirth, mug,*

*Nap, nape, nicknack, nook,*

*Pack, package, pad, pall, pang, pat, peak, pert, pet, pick, pie, pike, pitch, plod, pod, poke, pony, pool, pose, potter, pour, pout, prong, prop, prowl, puck, pucker, puddle, pug, put,*

*Quaff, quibble, quib, quirk,*

*Racket, riband, rill, rub,*

*Shamrock, skein, ship, slab, slough, snag, spate, spree, stab,*

*Tack, tall, taper, tether, twig,*

*Welt, etc.*

# ENGLISH ORTHOGRAPHY

AND

"SIMPLIFIED SPELLING"

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## AND
## "SIMPLIFIED SPELLING"

"I'll have it so . . . . . Who shall say me nay?" said Hotspur. The gallant spelling reformer virtually maintains a similar front. The perpetual-motion crank and the reformer have pestered mankind for a considerable time. They are hard-headed "varmints" to kill. The spelling reformer just now is notably in evidence and conspicuously audacious. He is strenuous.

Audacity and strenuosity are admirable when supported by reason; they may be tolerated even in the mistakes of genius; elsewhere they are ridiculous and dangerous. The boldest bull that ever entered a china shop has failed to win the approbation of mankind for rational conduct.

The reformers in English Orthography have never lacked audacity. One of them is strenuous. Very few of them have been afflicted with genius; and scarcely any ever upheld by reason. But one indisputable characteristic of the Orthographic Reformation is its immortality. He of the spelling, very properly, comes and goes—his restless mediocrity lives on forever.

Whenever this same spelling reformer feels called upon to discover the qualifications of his assumptions, he is not slow to set them forth. A Lounsbury declares his "real" scholarship. Another, with characteristic complacency, rests his fitness upon the inferences of erudition, proceeding from his staff-position on some periodical publication. Another harmless old gentleman, who has written some very funny as well as some very foolish things, feels, through some vague sense of inscrutable humor perhaps, that he possesses the all-round

qualifications for reforming something or other, or anything under the sun. He therefore assails English spelling from a joker's angle of verbal trajectory. But the most forcible claim to authority, outside Executive positiveness, inheres in a professorship. There is a charm in the word *professor* which is most alluring; it commands a polite ear; it is authoritative and forbidding; it wears a mask which is more than apt to terrify the layman. There is magic in these impudent assumptions and fatuous trappings—a magic which pretty effectually deters the non-specialist from venturing to break a lance with these Knights of Learning. Nor shall those of us who are yeomen—mere varlets outside the pale of clique—trespass upon the pre-empted preserves of these infallible gentry. For they would have us believe that they live in an esoteric Court of Scholastic Mystery, impenetrable to the average mind.

A very sensible leader, in *The New York Post*, brought to public attention the nonsensical efforts of American Spelling Reformers. It seems that certain gentlemen behind the veil formed themselves into a committee of Orthographic Safety. Then they drew up a spelling pledge called the "Declaration of Independence." This was alleged to bear the signatures of some well-known persons, who agreed "to use in private correspondence the amended spellings of the twelve words: *program*, *catalog*, *decalog*, *prolog*, *pedagog*, *demagog*, *tho*, *altho*, *thoro*, *thorofare*, *thru*, *thruout*." The twelve words have now grown to several hundred. This was called a "revolt," and was said to have been "started under favorable auspices and backed by plenty of money . . . . . it promises to be a revolution."

A few ancient reasons for orthographic revolution have been exhumed by the

makers of this wondrous declaration of independence, to which has been added the more startling excuse, "that teachers have passed resolutions against it" (the English spelling now in vogue).

The Editor of the *Post* says in closing: "Should our orthography ever be at the mercy of any adventurous band of literary marauders, we should all be crying out for another Charles Lamb, who, disgusted at his treatment by contemporaries, cried: 'Hang it, I'll write for antiquity!'"

This aforesaid "Declaration of Independence" is scarcely within the bounds of serious discussion. The Editor of the *Post* has treated it fully and with justice; that is to say, he has laughed at it lightly, pinked it with dexterous thrusts and treated it, generally, in a Voltairian fashion. The real question, however, of English Orthography may not be dismissed flippantly, or disposed

of with indifference. Opinions of distinguished scholars have not been wholly in accord; no more on this than on other subjects.

It is commendable of Professor Lounsbury to ask: "Who is it that has taught the teachers? How are we to know that the guides who take it upon themselves to lead us are guides in whom we can place implicit confidence?" Would it be an act of impertinence for the laic to ask such questions?

It sounds very well indeed, quite heroic, in fact, for Professor Skeat to say: "Let some of us dare to use our common sense, and not give way to what is supposed, I know not on what grounds, to be 'good authority,'" for many statements not unlike his own. Words such as these lose all heroism coming from a yeoman's lips; they require a sort of "cloth" to give them force and dignity. The linguistic mar-

graves and "literary marauders" seem to think that they possess about all the common sense that is available.

It is of small moment to these gentle folk that language serves mankind in general. The principal thing is, they would have us believe, that language was invented for the purpose of affording the professorial ilk suitable material for hobbies. That they sometimes ride their hobbies to death, is not an unwise provision of nature, surely.

Of all human inventions, language has the widest and most constant use. Its function is *expression.* In this it excels all other forms of art—architecture, sculpture, painting. Its chief consideration should be, how well it performs its sole function? However, since language split into two great parts with the invention of writing—that is to say, oral and written language, between which the multiple and extending

relations may be likened to a slow and inevitable growth—minor considerations of each part have thrust themselves into notice. One of these minor insistencies is orthography; another is orthoëpy. Both have been discussed for several centuries. Six hundred years ago a monk, named Ormin, tried to settle the question of orthography. He attempted to make the spelling of English words conform to their pronunciation. His dismal failure was but the earnest of a long list of failures equally dismal.

John Cheke, in the early part of the sixteenth century, or about three hundred years after the writer of "The Ormulum," tried his fist also at the reforming of English spelling. Cheke was a professor; he taught Greek at Cambridge. Why should he not upset English spelling? We are sure, at least, that he did not. Three hundred years before him, Ormin attempted to give

exact vowel sounds by writing consonants certainwise. Professor Cheke, on the contrary, applied his method directly to the vowels themselves. He thought to express their long sounds by doubling them. Hence he spelled *made* "*maad.*"

Following the Professor, came Sir Thomas Smith in 1658. Sir Thomas wrote a book on English Orthography in Latin. This was an act of singular wisdom. The title of his book was, "*De Recta et Emendata Linguæ Anglicanæ Scriptione.*" He was the first to propose a phonetic alphabet. He started that peculiar kind of craze which has come down to us. He was the father of a new failure—the ancestor of a whole line of failures.

The next year plain old John Hart brought out a book which he had the good taste to write in English. His book was called, "*An Orthographie containing the Due Order and Reason howe*

*to Write or Print th' Image of Mannes Voice most like to Life or Nature.*" He, too, insisted on phonetic spelling, as shown by an extract from his preface: "To the doubtfull of the English Orthographie . . . . we ought to use an order in writing which, nothing cared for unto this day, our predecessors have ben drouned in a maner of negligence, to bee contented with such maner of writing as they and we now have found from age to age, without any regard to the several parts of the voice, which the writing ought to represent . . . . And accordinglye here followeth a certain order of true writing of the speech, and founded on reason—mother of all sciences; wherewith you may happily be profited; and so health and the grace of God be with you. So be it." He probably found, as so many have since, that "reason" was a poor prop for orthography.

One hundred and nineteen years later, John Wilkins, Dean of Ripon, afterward Bishop of Chester, wrote a large folio which he called an "Essay," and in which he sought to reveal the true philosophy and scientific structure of language. His book was called: *An Essay toward a Real Character and a Philosophical Language.* But the Reverend one's efforts came to naught, very like those who seek fountains of youth, or pots of gold at the end of a rainbow. And for the very good reason, that the things which he hoped to discover did not exist then, nor do they exist now. For the science of language is quite different from the *art* of communication, in which he tried to find science and philosophy. It is difficult for many of us to realize that language is merely an art.

However, the zealous Dean invented a phonetic alphabet of four hundred and fifty characters. His phonetic al-

phabet fared no better than Ellis' "Glossic," or Sweet's "Romic" system. He gave us the Lord's Prayer somewhat after this phonetic fashion:

"*Your* fadher h*ou*itsh art in héven halloëd bi dhyi nam, dhyi cingdym cym, dhyi *ou*ill bi dyn, in erth az it iz in héven; giv ys dhis dai y*our* daili bred, and f*a*rgiv ys y*our* trespassez az *ou*ii f*a*rgiv dhem dhat trespas against ys, and led ys n*a*t int*ou* temptaisian, byt deliver ys fr*a*m ivil, f*a*r dhyin iz dhe cingdym, dhi pyouër and dhi gl*a*ri, f*a*r ever and ever. Amen."

But the good Dean's book went the way of mortals, even as he, and made as little impress on English spelling as the works of his predecessors.

Somewhat over a hundred years ago, John Walker attempted to settle the question of pronunciation for good and all. Unfortunately, or otherwise, he settled it no more effectually than Pro-

fessor Lounsbury has settled spelling in more recent years. Both Walker and Lounsbury had good and sufficient reasons for not settling them, inasmuch as, in the very nature of things, they cannot be *settled.*

Walker assumed the false premise that language was a combination of signs which should determine the articulation of corresponding sounds. In truth, language was, and is, nothing of the kind; but rather a combination of sounds which may be approximately indicated by the written signs. Expression—the sole function of language—was overlooked by him; and he failed also to grasp the fact that the only legitimate function of letters is to suggest to the mind the sounds of speech. He was over-zealous in trying to determine how certain combinations of characters should be pronounced. He put the cart before the horse. And so down to the

present time a long line of more or less notable orthographic and orthoëpic reformers have attempted to do what never has been done, and what never will be done, by the methods that have been employed.

Although we know very well that the Anglo-Saxon pronunciation was *meant* to be phonetic, it never reached that state. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there was a marked change in the sounds of English speech. Especially was this true when the Anglo-Saxon symbols gradually gave way to the French. In the fourteenth century "phonetic accuracy" wandered still farther away. In the fifteenth century the sound of final *e* was lost, and no longer formed a distinct syllable, but was retained symbolically "to denote the length of the preceding vowel." In the sixteenth century so called "etymological" and "phonetic" forms of spelling were the

fashion among some folk, although these forms were ignorantly applied, and resulted only in confusion. Since 1600, orthographic changes have been comparatively slight, while the changes in pronunciation, especially of the vowel-sounds, have varied from time to time considerably.

Even Alexander J. Ellis admits that pronunciation fluctuates suddenly, rather than gradually. And while this may not be wholly true, still, we know that orthoëpy is never stable long at a time. Man varies the sounds of his words in such an incalculable manner that it is impossible to conceive it to be done in accordance with any fixed principle. The variation seems rather to be governed by exigency, necessity, or whim. At all events, the history of English spelling proves that the pronunciation of words never has submitted to the rigidity of orthography, although it is not denied

that spelling has at times modified the pronunciation in a small way.

It scarcely requires a profound insight into language to see that usage precedes science; and that, while science may fashion orthography to its own liking, in a limited sense usage must govern orthoëpy. Reasoning from the known, it may be pardonable to predict that since usage has, in a broad sense, governed *both* spelling and pronunciation in the past, it is not unlikely to do so in future regardless of the bans of science, of "Declarations of Independence," or of other hysterics of spelling reformers. The reason of it is plainly to be seen; for inasmuch as the function of language is expression, it follows that unless language can be understood, its function is destroyed. Certainly it could not be understood, except by a relatively few specialists, if it were to vary widely from common usage.

As a matter of fact, we pronounce and spell as we do, out of necessity, and for a similar reason to that which debars us from changing our ancestors, however much it might please us to do so. Words of today are the children of yesterday. Many of them do not suit us; and if "official" action could erase the "numberless false etymologies" no objection should be made. But a convention of reformers, or a clique of wiseacre specialists, is as powerless to change the fashion of speaking and writing words, as would be a convention of noisy crows. The change, on the whole, must be slow and according to growth. And it is advisable that it should be; for it would be no less a task to overturn a written language, than a spoken one. In the admirable words of Professor Brander Matthews is the key to the whole situation: "We have now to face the fact that in no language is a sudden and far-reaching

reform in spelling ever likely to be attained; and in none is it less likely than in English." Professor Matthews has, however, developed the nimble professorial faculty of straddling the fence with a perfection of grace which is almost alarming. But, granting for a moment the possibility, it is not difficult to see that the unfavorable consequences would far outnumber and overrun the advantages to be gained. The literature of the past would be, to all general purposes, blotted out. Erato would needs be born again, even as the unregenerate sinner. The poets would have to appeal to the gods for a strong hippocras with which to inspire new songs—all which, however, might not be the very worst evil that could befall the children of men. And since the very nature of orthography is incompatible, precisely, with that of orthoëpy, another reformation would be required within a few

generations. Absolute conformity of sound to symbol is not possible. There is not even a general agreement amongst us, as to the exact utterance of combinations of sounds forming words and phrases. Different persons give different shades and tones to some of the simplest sounds. No two organs of hearing are exactly alike. No two persons articulate precisely the same. And the usage of one generation, and of one locality, differs from that of another. If examples were needed, English abounds in them. For instance, *sewer* was once upon a time pronounced *shore*. The *ew* had the sound of *ew* in *sew* (sow), and *s* the sound of *s* in sugar. In one locality *door* is called *doh*, and so forth. If revolutions, therefore, in orthography were once begun in earnest, they would, like those of a political kind in Central America, go on forever.

However, if a language could be re-

formed by an act of Congress, and a new one drafted by the hand of Science, and enforced by the police, it were possible to see dimly how word-sounds might be made to conform to orthography. For it is not beyond average intelligence to grasp the postulate, that if the number of sounds in a language could be exactly determined; if these sounds could be equally well apprehended by all; if a letter could be provided for each sound; if the sounds could remain unchanged—always tallied by the letters; and if a uniform conception of their value could be had by all persons using them—then any word could be easily and exactly expressed orally, as in writing. But this condition never has existed, and, moreover, the nature of language, the laws of physiology, the variations in functions of sense, the element of diversity, so to speak, in mankind, all make it probable that

this ideal condition will not soon come to pass.

No one could reasonably object to the striking out of certain superfluous letters in many words, where these letters are clearly the interpolations of false philologists, out of deference to supposed philologic inheritances.

The opinion is pretty general among those qualified to judge, that our present fashion in spelling should be reduced to some sort of system. The natural question is, How shall it be done, and by whom? Many specialists in philology have their own peculiar hobbies, which they ride oft-times as ridiculously as the amateur philologist insists upon certain etymological relationships between words which have nothing whatever etymologically in common.

No one should deny that it is the province of the true scholar to indicate the way to orthographic simplification;

but beyond that he cannot go. It might be pertinent to inquire, by what authority have individuals, or conventions the right to lay down laws for the regulation either of orthography or orthoëpy as against general usage? It requires, and justly so, the consent and co-operation of the majority of English-speaking people to change radically either their pronunciation or their spelling, however good, or bad, the change might be.

If orthography is a growth, it has doubtless been marred by false and fussy etymologists, just as it has been helped and beautified by scholars, whose judgment was not sapped by their scholastic stunts. Nevertheless, in the main, orthography must find its simplification, its purity and growth, in usage rather than in the dogmatic dictates of the professorial clique.

So far as I know, no one makes a plea for present English spelling on

the grounds of its "sacredness," or "inspiration," as Professor Matthews seems to think. One scarcely needs to grow old before learning to take with the eternal grain of salt many statements made by self-anointed authorities. The great trouble with this class of reformers is, that they overreach and calk themselves.

Richard Grant White adhered to many of these views long ago; and while they are no more original for that reason, they are none the less pat today.

Some of those who are loudest in their protestations against the present style in spelling—those who insist that it should conform to sound, and hence acquire a shifting value—are not blind to the fact that a changing orthography would be a bad thing. It is well recognized that in rhyme, for instance, the correspondence of sound is vital, rather than of form.

Our present method of spelling may be very "contemptible," as Professor Lounsbury says; and the reasons given for adhering to it instead of "reforming" it to the verge and pitch of anarchy may be even more "contemptible," as the learned Professor clearly states; yet I fail to see wherein Professor Lounsbury, by either his "real" scholarship or his influence on English, is justified in his remarks. If, as the Professor says, there is "a divorce . . . between English letters and English scholarship," the "divorce" has not impaired English literature, nor in any appreciable degree the enjoyment of it; it has not added in noticeable profusion to the laurels on the brow of English scholarship—certainly it has not placed a tyrant's crown thereon.

Suppose that the present orthography "hides the history of the word instead of revealing it": how would the world

be improved by revealing the history of words, at the expense of a common understanding of the words themselves? Why need orthography, necessarily, be a guide to the derivation of a word, except for the convenience of such learned and good-natured gentlemen as Professor Lounsbury and some others? If the "consensus of scholars makes the slightest possible impression upon men of letters throughout the whole great Anglo-Saxon community," so much the worse for the scholars. But the accuracy of this statement is open to doubt, I fear, as well as that of another statement by Professor Lounsbury, that, "There is hardly one of them [men of letters] who does not fancy he is manifesting a noble conservatism by holding fast to some spelling peculiarly absurd, and thereby maintaining a bulwark against the ruin of the tongue." I have known a few men of letters, and I have never known

one who did not have something to write about, other than kindergarten quibbles and the pedagogue's hair-splitting theories.

Surely, a change in spelling should not be the most engrossing pursuit of linguists. For the most part, people get on tolerably well with their present orthography. It satisfies the needs of a splendid literature; it accommodates the artistic and daily requirements of our language. As for speech, spelling has nothing to do with it. Orthography is peculiar to writing, and there would be no occasion for it without. Spelling has nothing to do with the higher arts—nothing to do with ethics or morals. Words are not made by combining letters, but by combining sounds, for which the letters are more or less arbitrary symbols.

Previous to the eleventh century, and before the conquest by William

of Normandy, only a few words had been taken into English directly from the Latin. It has been estimated that there were about one hundred and sixty of such words. But up to the present time the number of primary words, thus directly appropriated, is somewhere between twenty-five hundred and three thousand. For many centuries Latin has been the learned tongue—the ecclesiastic and scholastic language. It has been in literary use from an early period. Besides this, the Vulgate edition of the Bible in itself has been the means largely of increasing the list of our Latin words unmodified by other languages. These words were taken from a "dead" language—dead only in the sense that its orthoëpy had perished. So far as English is concerned, in appropriating these words, their *sounds* did not precede their *forms*. At first, the process of Anglicizing them amounted to little more

than pronouncing them according to the sound-value of our alphabet. Thus, the adjustment of sound to symbol was purely arbitrary. How could they be subjected to a phonetic standard—and why should they? The notion suggests to me the incident of the simple-minded fellow, who went to an artist to have his mother's portrait painted. The terms were agreed upon, and the painter appointed a sitting. "But mother is dead," said the son. "Then bring me a likeness of her," said the artist. "I haven't any," replied the son, "but I can tell you exactly how she looked." The painter carefully noted the description, and in due time sent for his client to pass upon the portrait. The simple-minded fellow stood before the canvas for several minutes in deep meditation, silently weeping the while. The artist, flattered at the tearful evidence of his success, exclaimed: "Fine picture of your mother,

eh?" "Yes," said the young man, wiping away a tear, "fine picture, but it breaks my heart to see how poor mother has changed—and to think, she's been dead only three months, at that."

Next to Latin, for scholastic and scientific purposes, comes the introduction of Greek words. Up to the time of Edward VI, they were borrowed in Latinized or Gallicized forms. "Indeed," to use the words of Skeat, "all Greek words have to be transliterated into Latin letters before we can make use of them in English. . . . . Thus from a purely *linguistic* point of view, the value of Greek as compared with Latin—for the purpose of explaining English words—may be said to be very slight."

It does not require a great "scholar" to discern that Latin and Greek words, for the most part, were not introduced directly into English, but became Angli-

cized through Old French. And it follows plainly enough, therefore, that the orthography which incorporates unmodified Latin and Greek forms, except where these forms are borrowed directly, is illogical. This faulty logic becomes more noticeable when it is remembered that the Latin and Greek elements in our tongue are small, relatively, compared with the native English, Scandinavian and Old French. And to be consistent, I suppose, our spelling should suggest etymologies coming from the greatest source of our vocabulary, if it is to suggest those of smaller tributaries. It may be urged, however, that orthography was not invented to serve the ends of etymology, since the purposes of the two are to all intents so widely different.

If the phonetic reformers—the "only real etymologists"—were to devote themselves more to the task of ridding our

tongue of the warts and froth of speech, it would be better than making themselves ill over the matter of whether the *ue* should be lopped off the word *catalogue*. English has needless words and cumbrous phrases to be disposed of—bad words that need weeding out, and good words that need cultivating. There should be more exactness in the meaning of words, and greater precision in the use of them; and there are many worthy words whose compounding power might well be increased.

Another fact, apparently missed by the phonetic reformers, is that orthography, in many instances, serves to suggest *ideas* rather than *sounds*. This is true in scores of technical words as well as in many common words introduced into English directly from a so-called dead language. To degrade these words, by reducing them to a phonetic standard, is to deprive them of their sole use.

As I have intimated before, if written language conformed to spoken language, one would, of course, be as variable as the other; and, as marked peculiarities of pronunciation exist in different localities, phonetic spelling would naturally result in confusion. To recur to the word *door*, for example: in one locality it would be spelled *doh;* in another *dorr;* and so forward with hundreds of others. The language of the "smart set," for instance, would be totally incomprehensible to the "masses"—which would be a great pity. As it is, faulty as our spelling may be, *door* written everywhere is equally well understood by all. And while there seems to be a tendency toward uniformity of pronunciation everywhere, and while that tendency is strong enough to bear one standard of orthography, it is hardly strong enough to support a radical and sweeping change.

The etymological considerations of

spelling are of little importance to any except etymologists. Nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand persons use language for other than purely etymological purposes. In these blessed days, the poor have to scratch for food and raiment, and the rich for new sensations. These days are not essentially different from other days, and the far-future, even, withholds from us any signs of a rosy millennium. So it would seem that the purely etymological aspect of the subject is of relatively small importance.

No objection is urged against that which suggests etymological trails in the underbrush of words, whether the "real" etymology is discovered in a spelling which retains root-remnants and silent letters of other days, or whether in the sounds which compose the words. And if, on the other hand, the letters of a word fail to correspond exactly to its sounds,

and thereby, in a measure, obscure the word's etymology, which so greatly exasperates the Reverend Professor Walter W. Skeat, what of it? He should still be able to teach Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge, and we should still be able to read the masters of the past, and to express our loves and hopes—our joys of flesh and aspirations of the soul—our dreams and woes—our common thought of daily wont, and all the nobler pleasures of all higher art. While the history of English orthography is interesting, because in it only are we able to determine the *manner* of spelling words as we do, yet it is not, I venture to say again, the most important thing in the study of language.

Professor Francis A. March was greatly exercised over the movement of reform in English spelling. He objected to a comparatively changeless orthography, because it "destroys the material for

etymological study." Almost any oafish yeoman ought to be able to comprehend the seriousness of such a situation in the eyes of a professor. Still, if a few professors suffer for the convenience of millions of folk less learned, I, for one, have no tears to shed. Besides, an approximate fixity of orthography seems to me to be essential to the enduring beauty of literature; preserving forms which otherwise would be lost in ruin.

Dear old Max Müller believed in a reform in English spelling. So do many; but he also believed that if it were done, it should be done sweepingly. And as to the feasibility of that, he expressed grave doubts.

To reiterate, the only function of writing, apart from ideographic methods, is to *indicate* sounds, not to paint them.

There are many who complain of the influence of the introduction of printing on English orthography. Little need be

said in reply to them; for it is pretty well proved that printing gave this value, at least, to orthography: it made it "common to all the millions of the English-speaking peoples."

Dr. Johnson also comes in for a share of blame; but it has been clearly shown by White that the Doctor's *Dictionary* "merely recorded a spelling that had been established for fifty years."

Now let us hope that from the great diversity of opinion on English orthography may issue beauty and utility; and that from our imperfect spelling may come a simpler and purer form. But I fear me that the signers of "Declarations of Independence," meddlesome coteries of "literary marauders," and bigoted margraves of the class-room will not force the growth.

Richard Grant White long ago concluded that a radical reformation in English spelling was *first*, unnecessary;

*second*, undesirable; and *third*, impossible. This recalls to mind an old story of a Scotch preacher, who, upon meeting one of his hearers after the services, inquired of him how he liked the sermon. The reply was: "I dinna like it for three rizzens—*first*, ye read it; *second*, ye dinna read it weel; and *third*, it was na worth readin'."

# WORDS WHICH HAVE CHANGED SINCE SHAKSPERE WROTE

*THE TRAGEDIE OF MACBETH*

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## *THE TRAGEDIE OF MACBETH*

(A Few Examples from Elizabethan English)

ABOUND, "*aboundeth* in wickednesse"; "to *abound* in . . . vices."

*Malcome* But I have none: the king-becoming graces,
As justice, verity, temp'rance, stablenesse,
Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowlinesse,
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude,
I have no rellish of them, but *abound*
In the division of each severall crime,
Acting in many wayes.
*Act IV, Sc. III*

ABUSE, "to deceive"; "*Abuses* me to damne me."

*Macbeth* Now o're the one halfe-world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreames *abuse*
The curtain'd sleepe.
*Act II, Sc. I*

ADDITION, "title; mark of distinction."

*Rosse* In which *addition*, haile, most worthy thane!
*Act I, Sc. III*

ADHERE, "suit, agree, befitting."

*Lady Macbeth* Nor time nor place
Did then *adhere*, and yet you would make both.
*Act I, Sc. VII*

ADMIR'D, "amazing, astonishing."

*Lady Macbeth* You have displac'd the mirth, broke the good meeting
With most *admir'd* disorder.

AFFECTION, "disposition."

*Malcome* With this there growes
In my most ill-compos'd *affection* such
A stanchlesse avarice that, were I king,
I should cut off the nobles for their lands.
*Act IV, Sc. III*

AGITATION, "activity."

*Doctor* A great perturbation in nature, to receyve at once the benefit of sleepe, and do the effects of watching! In this slumbry *agitation*, besides her walking and other actuall performances, what, at any time, have you heard her say?
*Act V, Sc. I*

ANNOYANCE, "injury."

*Doctor* More needs she the divine then the physitian. God, God forgive us all! Looke after her; Remove from her the meanes of all *annoyance*, And still keepe eyes upon her.
*Act V Sc. I*

APPALL, "make pale."

*Macbeth* I, and a bold one, that dare looke on that which might *appall* the divell.
*Act III, Sc. IV*

APPROVE, "prove, show."

*Banquo* This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting marlet, does *approve*
By his lov'd mansionry that th' heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here.
*Act I, Sc. VI*

ARTIFICIALL, "cunning, shading into deceitful."

*Hecat* And that, distill'd by magicke slights,
Shall raise such *artificiall* sprights
As by the strength of their illusion
Shall draw him on to his confusion.
*Act III, Sc. V*

ATTEND, "await, wait for, expect."

*Lady Macbeth* Say to the king I would *attend* his leysure
For a few words.
*Act III, Sc. II*

*Macduffe* Let our just censures
*Attend* the true event, and put we on
Industrious souldiership.
*Act V, Sc. IV*

BESIDE, "so as to miss."

*Malcome* We have met with foes
That strike *beside* us.
*Act V, Sc. VII*

BESTRIDE, "defend."

"Tels them he doth *bestride* a bleeding land."

*Macduffe* Let us rather
Hold fast the mortall sword, and like good men
*Bestride* our downfall birthdome.
*Act IV, Sc. III*

CHALLENGE, "find fault with."

*Macbeth* Who may I rather *challenge* for unkindnesse
Then pitty for mischance.
*Act III, Sc. IV*

CHAMBERS, "private rooms or residence of a king."

*Malcome* Cosins, I hope the dayes are neere at hand
That *chambers* will be safe.
*Act V, Sc. IV*

CHANCE, "misfortune, calamity."

*Macbeth* Had I but dy'd an houre before this *chance*.
*Act II, Sc. III*

CHASTISE, "to put down rebellion."

*Lady Macbeth* High thee hither,
That I may powre my spirits in thine eare,
And *chastise* with the valour of my tongue
All that impeides thee from the golden round
Which fate and metaphysicall ayde doth seeme
To have thee crown'd withall.
*Act I, Sc. V*

CHOPS, "jaws."

*Captaine* Which nev'r shooke hands nor bad farwell to him
Till he unseam'd him from the nave to th' *chops*
And fix'd his head upon our battlements.
*Act I, Sc. II*

DISPAIRE, "cease to trust in."

*Macduffe* *Dispaire* thy charme;
And let the angell whom thou still hast serv'd
Tell thee Macduffe was from his mother's womb
Untimely ript.
*Act V, Sc. VII*

DISPATCH, "management."

*Lady Macbeth* And you shall put
This night's great business into my *dispatch*.
*Act I, Sc. V*

DRENCHED, "drowned, submerged."

*Lady Macbeth* . . . . when in swinish sleepe
Their *drenched* natures lyes as in a death.
*Act I, Sc. VII*

FACT, "crime"—"Still retained in legal phrase 'before the fact.'"

*Lenox* . . . . how monstrous
It was for Malcome and for Donalbane
To kill their gracious father? damned *fact!*
*Act III, Sc. VI*

FAST, "sound, now used only in the phrase 'fast asleep.'"

*Gentlewoman* Since his Mijesty went into the field I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon her, unlocke her closset, take foorth paper, folde it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seale it, and againe returne to bed; yet all this while in a most *fast* sleepe.
*Act V, Sc. I*

FILTHIE, "murky."

*Witches, all* Padock calls anon.
Faire is foule, and foule is faire,
Hover through th' fogge and *filthie* ayre.
*Act I, Sc. I*

GALL, "poison, venom."

*Lady Macbeth* Come to my woman's brests,
And take my milke for *gall*, you murth'ring ministers.
*Act I, Sc. V*

HARNESS, "armour."

*Macbeth* Ring the alarum bell! blow, winde! come wracke!
At least wee'l dye with *harnesse* on our backe.
*Act V, Sc. V*

HOLP: strong form of the verb—"past participle of *help*"; now a colloquialism among the ignorant whites and blacks of some of the Southern States, especially of Georgia.

*King* Where's the Thane of Cawdor?
We courst him at the heeles, and had a purpose
To be his purveyor: but he rides well,
And his great love, sharpe as his spurre, hath
*holp* him
To his home before us.
*Act I, Sc. VI*

ILLNESSE, "unscrupulousness."

*Lady Macbeth* Thou would'st be great;
Art not without ambition, but without
The *illnesse* should attend it.
*Act I, Sc. V*

KNIT, "to bind."

. . . . "let me teach you how to *knit* againe
This scattered corne into one mutuall sheafe."

*Macbeth* Sleepe that *knits* up the ravel'd sleave of care.
*Act II, Sc. II*

KNOT, "bond, tie."

*Malcome* Why in that rawnesse left you wife and childe,
Those precious motives, those strong *knots* of love,
Without leave-taking?
*Act IV, Sc. III*

LEAVE, "royal permission to depart or final audience with the king."

*Malcome* Our lacke is nothing but our *leave.*
*Act IV, Sc. III*

MARRY, "to be sure."

*Lenox* The gracious Duncan
Was pittied of Macbeth: *marry,* he was dead:
And the right valiant Banquo walk'd too late.
*Act III, Sc. VI*

MATED, "dazed."

*Doctor* My minde she has *mated*, and amaz'd my sight.
*Act V, Sc. I*

MELT, "fade away."

. . . . "the boy . . . was *melted* like a vapour from her sight."

*Macbeth* . . . . and what seem'd corporall
*Melted* as breath into the winde.
*Act I, Sc. III*

METAPHYSICAL, "supernatural."

(See *Chastise*)

MONKIE, "term of endearment."

*Wife* Now, God helpe thee, poore *monkie*! But how wilt thou do for a father?
*Act IV, Sc. II*

MORTIFIED, "benumbed."

*Menteth* Revenges burne in them; for their deere causes
Would do the bleeding, and the grim alarme
Excite the *mortified* man.
*Act V, Sc. II*

NERVES, "sinews."

*Macbeth* What man dare, I dare:
Approach thou like the rugged Russian beare,
The arm'd rhinoceros, or th' Hircan tiger;
Take any shape but that, and my firme *nerves*
Shall never tremble.
*Act III, Sc. IV*

NICE, "accurate with the notion of fanciful, sophisticated."

*Macduffe* Oh, relation
Too *nice*, and yet too true!
*Act IV, Sc. III*

NOYSE, "musical sounds."

. . . . "the isle is full of *noyses*,
Sounds and sweet aires that give delight and hurt not."

*Macbeth* Why sinks the caldron? and what *noise* is this?
*Act IV, Sc. I*

OBLIVIOUS, "causing forgetfulness."

*Macbeth* Cure her of that.
Can'st thou not minister to a minde diseas'd,
Plucke from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the braine,
And with some sweet *oblivious* antidote
Cleanse the stufft bosome of that perillous stuffe
Which weighes upon the heart?
*Act V, Sc. III*

OCCASION, "necessity."

*Lady Macbeth* Hearke! more knocking:
Get on your night-gowne, least *occasion* call us
And shew us to be watchers: be not lost
So poorely in your thoughts.
*Act II, Sc. II*

PEAKE, "grow sickly."

*First Witch* Wearie sev'nights nine times nine
Shall he dwindle, *peake*, and pine;
*Act I, Sc. III*

PREDOMINANCE, "astrological influence."

"Fooles by heavenly compulsion, knaves, theeves, and treachers by spherical *predominance*, drunkards, lyars, and adulterers by an enforc'd obedience of planatary influence."

*Rosse* Is 't night's *predominance*, or the dayes shame,
That darknesse does the face of earth intombe,
When living light should kisse it?
*Act II, Sc. IV*

QUELL; usually a verb; "murder, to slay"—slightly euphemistic.

*Lady Macbeth* What not put upon
His spungie officers, who shall bear the guilt
Of our great *quell.*

*Act I, Sc. VII*

RAVEL'D, "entangled."

. . "as you would unwind her love from him,
Least it should *ravell* and be good to none."

*Macbeth* Sleepe that knits up the *ravel'd* sleave of care.

*Act II, Sc. II*

RAVISHING, "rapid, swift."

*Macbeth* Alarum'd by his centinell, the wolfe,
Whose howle's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
With Tarquin's *ravishing* slides, towards his designe
Moves like a ghost.

*Act II, Sc. I*

REFLECTION, "direct shining."

"May never glorious sunne *reflex* his beames
Upon the countrey where you make abode."

RELATION, "report."

"I will believe thee and make my senses credite thy *relation.*"

ROOTE, "progenitor."

*Banquo* Thou hast it now, king, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the weyard women promis'd; and I feare
Thou playd'st most fowly for 't: yet it was saide
It should not stand in thy posterity,
But that myselfe should be the *roote* and father
Of many kings.

*Act III, Sc. I*

REMORSE, "compassion."

*Lady Macbeth* Come, you spirits
That tend on mortall thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crowne to th' toe, top-full
Of direst crueltie! make thick my blood,
Stop up th' accesse and passage to *remorse*,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my full purpose, etc.
*Act I, Sc. V*

SEWER, "chief butler."

Clap me a clean towell about you, like a *sewer;* and bare-headed march afore it (i. e., the dinner) with good confidence. —*Jonson*

SLEAVE, "any kind of ravelled stuffe, or sleave silk"; variously spelled *sleeve*, in the Folio; *sleive* in the Quarto.

(See *ravel'd*)

SMELLS, "breathes upon."

(See *approve*)

SOLE, "mere."

*Malcome* This tyrant, whose *sole* name blisters our tongues,
Was once thought honest.
*Act IV, Sc. III*

STOUT, "proud, bold."

"As *stout* and proud as he were lord of all."

*Rosse* He findes there in the *stout* Norweyan rankes.
*Act I, Sc. III*

STUFFE, "rant."

"At this fusty *stuffe* . . Achilles . . laughs"

*Lady Macbeth* O proper *stuffe!*
This is the very painting of your feare.
*Act III, Sc. IV*

SUGGESTION, "temptation."

*Macbeth* I am Thane of Cawdor:
If good, why doe I yeeld to that *suggestion*
Whose horrid image doth unfixe my heire
And make my seated heart knock at my ribbes
Against the use of nature.
*Act I, Sc. III*

SUMMER, "pleasant."

*Macduffe* This avarice
Sticks deeper, growes with more pernicious roote
Then *summer*-seeming lust, and it hath bin
The sword of our slaine kings.
*Act IV, Sc. III*

TAINT, "wither."

" . . failing of that moisture it flags, *tainteth* (withereth) and by and by drieth away."

*Macbeth* Bring me no more reports: let them flye all:
Till Byrnane wood remove to Dunsinane,
I cannot *taint* with feare.
*Act V, Sc. III*

TOUCH, "harme, injure."

"Seeing his reputation *touch'd* to death."

*Macbeth* Duncane is in his grave;
After life's fitfull fever he sleepes well;
Treason has done his worst: nor steele nor poyson,
Mallice domestique, forraine levie, nothing,
Can *touch* him further.
*Act III, Sc. II*

TRIFLES, "tricks."

"Some enchanted *triffle* to abuse (deceive) me."

*Banquo* But 'tis strange:
And oftentimes, to winne us to our harme,
The instruments of darknesse tell us truths,
Winne us with honest *trifles* to betray 's
In deepest consequence.
*Act I, Sc. III*

TROUBLE, "the sense of means of physical annoyance."

*Witches* For a charme of powerful *trouble*,
Like a hell-broth boyle and bubble.
*Act IV, Sc. I*

UNSPEAKE, "to speak the contrary of."

*Malcome* For even now
I put myselfe to thy direction, and
*Unspeake* mine own detraction, heere abjure
The taints and blames I laid upon myselfe,
For strangers to my nature.
*Act IV, Sc. III*

UNTITLED, "having no title."

"False Deussa now *untitled* queene."

*Macduffe* O nation miserable,
With an *untitled* tyrant bloody sceptred,
When shalt thou see thy wholesome dayes againe,
Since that the truest issue of thy throne
By his owne interdiction stands accus'd,
And does blaspheme his breed?
*Act IV, Sc. III*

WOMANLY, "weak, unmanly."

*Wife* . . . . why then, alas!
Do I put up that *womanly* defence,
To say I have done no harme?
*Act IV, Sc. II*

# COMMONPLACE POETRY

## COMMONPLACE POETRY

POETRY is so deeply blended with man's nature that he has ceased to remark it. Poetry and passion go hand in hand. We no longer wonder at the red fountain of the breast that, mounting the brow, falls in blushes on the cheek of beauty. The circling sun no longer prostrates us in worship at his rising—few of us now throw westward kisses when he sets. Long association dulls the edge of feeling. Beauty pales before the continued gaze. Joy dies if kept too long in one position. The happy man continually shifts his view-point. The wise man ever changes his angle of vision. Mental relations must forever be shuffled if we would play with our environment

and keep up interest in the game. So obvious is the truth of this that it might almost be called *vérité de la Palice.*

Inexhaustible riches of poetry are everywhere evident in our language if we will but focus the mind's eye on their beauty. Speech for the most part is phraseology, and yet oftentimes a single word holds all the wealth and spirit of a perfect poem. Look at many of our commonest words: visualize their original meanings. In some we find the savage growls of wild beasts: these were born of bitter hatred and of red revenge; and others came forth from love and large self-sacrifice. Some breathe only of hope: "the stars have fashioned them"—others are sighs of despair—echoes of agony, terror and defeat. Again, there are some that shine like gold and seem soft like silk. A few are dancing sprites of joy; and many are moans of old grief. Words of passion and imagination have been

called "winds of the soul"; there are others that seem like heavens in which darkness touches lips with dawn. Some words are crystals of human history—in them we read what man has suffered and enjoyed: we hear the shouts of victory and the bugles of retreat—we see again the battles lost and won. "Words are the shadows of all that has been—the mirrors of all that is."

*Incentive* meant "that which sets in tune"; *instigation* comes "from a root which means, 'to goad'"; *depend* originally meant, "to hang from"; *front* was forehead; *spoil*, "to strip off the armor, etc., of a slain or defeated enemy"; *to fret*, "to eat up, to devour"; *precocious*, "too early ripe"; and so forward in such words as: *chimera*, *braggadocio*, a *lovelace*, a *guy*, a *gay Lothario*, a *Paul Pry*, *Simon Pure*, a *Mrs. Harris*, *Mrs. Grundy*, a *jehu*, a *Benedick*, *meander*, a *Goth*, a *Vandal*, a *Tartar*, *assassin*,

*magic, phaeton, sandwich, muslin, magnet, jack, demijohn,* etc.

Thousands of words are crystallized poems. To make sure of it, we need only to dig them out of time's rubbish and to wash away the accretions which distort them and hide the beauty of their primitive meanings. For instance, there is *tribulation: tribulatio* originally signified the operation of separating the wheat from the chaff by threshing or beating with an instrument (L. *tribulum*). *Desultory* is another interesting word, by way of example. The Latin *desultor* is "one who rides two or three horses at once, leaps from one to the other, being never on the back of any one of them long." Therefore, a *desultory* man "is one who jumps from one study to another, and never continues for any length of time in one." And *caprice*, which came to us by way of the French from (It.) *capriccio*, and (L.) *caper*,

had a picturesque primitive meaning. "*Capriccio*, a sudden start, a freak motion; apparently from (It.) *capro*, a goat, as of 'the skip of a goat'." "A *caprice*, then, is a movement of the mind as unaccountable, as little to be guessed beforehand, as the springs and bounds of a goat."

So it is with proper names and place-names; when we resolve them into their original meanings they often become musical and poetic, as are the words: *Mississippi*, *Minnehaha*, *Manhattan*, *Tacoma*, *Ontario*, *Mohegan*, *Florida*, *Madeira*, and a thousand others.

We have not forgotten that *Margaret* meant the Pearl; *Esther*, the Star; *Susanna*, the Lily; *Stephen*, the Crown; and *Albert*, "the illustrious in birth."

Those who have visited Lucerne have, most likely, ascended "Pilatus," as *Mons Pileatus* is commonly called; yet all may not remember that the name signi-

fies *the cloud-capped hill*, and has no relation whatever to the ridiculous tale of Pilate's remorse, and suicide by drowning in its lake, as is so often told by the enterprising guides to gaping tourists. *Himalaya*, likewise, refers to *the abode of snow.*

So too is *pétrel*, the "little Peter," who, like unto the Apostle Peter, at his Master's bidding walks upon the waves of a stormy sea. There is *squirrel*, the umbrella-tail, or shadow-tail, or tail-in-air according to "Hiawatha":

> Boys shall call you Adjidaumo,
> Tail-in-air the boys shall call you.

Some words are so sweet of sound that they carry scarcely any more weight than a bird in its flight, and need no other meaning than their beauty. "A thought is married to a sound and a child-word is born." We find these scattered through idiomatic speech, which is always

more or less poetic. In Lancashire the *Aurora Borealis* is called "the Merry Dancers"; and in Denmark the lines of descent are often spoken of as "the sword line" (male) and "the spindle line" (female). Excellent examples of the poetic. Again, *dactyl*, a measure in verse, has "reference to the long first joint of the finger, and to the two shorter which follow." *Architecture* has been called "frozen music"; and we have many such alliterative combinations as: *wind* and *weather*, *weal* and *woe*, *safe* and *sound*, *chick* nor *child*, *house* and *home*, *kith* and *kin*.

What country-boy is unacquainted with "the devil's darning-needle," which, like a jeweled arrow, darts among the flowers or poises over the swimming-pool? We have all heard the puff-ball called "the devil's snuff-box"; and we have all admired the *lady-bird* and watched the *king-fisher*, and dreamed among such

flowers of our youth as: *Aaron's rod, bleeding-heart, bachelor-buttons, four-o'clocks, honeysuckle, brown-eyed Susans, morning-glories, passion-flowers, angel's eyes, blue-bells, heart's-ease, maiden-hair, meadow-sweet, lady-slippers, rosemary, larkspur* and *sundew.*

"You call it sundew: how it grows,
If with its color it have breath,
If life taste sweet to it, if death
Pain its soft petal, no man knows:
Man has no sight or sense that saith."

How commonplace and yet how poetic is the word *daisy*—"day's eye," or, as formerly spelled, "daiesighe"!

"Fair fall that gentle flower,
A golden tuft set in a silver crown."

"That wel by reson men hit calle may
The 'dayesye' or elles the 'ye of day.'"

Thus we have the sun's disk of gold mirrored in the meadow's tiny flower wherefrom its circling silver leaves are

symbolic of the rays of day. Here, in the linking of "heaven's eye of day" with a field-flower, we discover fine poetic fancy and fair imagination. And *margarita*, or little pearl, not of the sea but of the sward,—how sweet the name!

So, in fine, we have the *dandelion*, or lion's tooth—from the French, *dent de lion*.—

(TO MRS. A. H.)

O dandelion peeping up
From grasses green,
Where many a nodding buttercup
Half-wake is seen,
Where violets with purple dreams
Are meek and low;
And golden sunlight slants and streams
Where lilies grow—
I wonder if your purpose is
To cheer the land
God gave to men with gold of His
All-unseen hand;
Or if it be to teach us, here
In lowly places,
That Beauty blossoms ever near
In flowery faces.

# BOOKS AND AUTHORS

# BOOKS AND AUTHORS

## NOTE ONE

INSTEAD of cluttering these pages with notes and references, which few read, I will give a list of authors and books consulted, and in some cases quoted from, during the preparation of this volume, for the convenience of those who may wish to pursue the subject further.


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Shakspere.
Sheridan.
Skeat, W. W.
Smith, T.
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Stevenson, R. L.
Sweet.
Swinburne.
Trench, R. C.
Voltaire.
Walker, J.
White, R. G.
Whitney, W. D.
Wilkins, J.
Wright, J.

## NOTE TWO

*The Changing Values of English Speech* was written with special reference to the author's *The Worth of Words* (Hinds, Noble and Eldredge); that is to say, one volume supplements the other.

# INDEX

# INDEX


A

Aaron's rod, 278
Aberdeen, 47
Ability, 159, 160
Able, 160
Abominable, 176, 177
Abound, 257
Abstract terms, 124
Abuse, 257
Acknowledge and confess, 118
Act, 160, 161
Actio, 160
Action, 161
Actum, 160
Addison, 169
Addition, 257
Adhere, 257
Adjidaumo, 276
Admir'd, 258
Aestimo, 161
Affection, 258
Affection for words, 78
Aggravate, 161
Aggravatus, 161
Agitation, 258
Agricola, 45, 46
Aim, 161
Albert, 275
All, 162
Alliteration, 81
Alphabet, phonetic, 228
Altho, 221
Angel's-eyes, 278
Angles, 47, 48
Angle's-Land, 47
Anglian, 47
Anglo-French, 49
Anglo-Saxon, 46, 47, 48
Annoyance, 258
Appall, 258
Apple, evolution of, 57
Approve, 258
Arabic, 53
Archaic words, 90
Architecture, 277
Aristotle, 148
Arsenic, 128
Art, 98
Artistic temperament, 99
Art of language-expression, 99
Artificiall, 259
Assassin, 273
Association, 88

B

Bab, 202
Baban, 201

Babe, 201
Babel, 155
Bachelor buttons, 278
Bacon, 107
Bad, 202
Badde, 202
Badder, 203
Bakke, 205
Bal, 203
Bald, 203
Balled, 203
Ballid, 203
Bard, 203, 204
Bardd, 204
Bardh, 204
Barrach, 204
Barrow, 204
Barrowed, 204
Barz, 204
Bascaid, 204
Basced, 204
Basged, 204
Basket, 204
Bat, 204, 205
Bata, 205
Batarag, 205
Batte, 205
Batty, 205
Bauble, 205
Beauty, 64
Bedlam, VI
Benedick, 273
Beorgan, 204
Bequeath and convey, 118
Beran, 204
Berg, 204
Beside, 259
Bestride, 259
Bhrag, 209
Bible, Vulgate ed., 243
Bicker, 206
Bicra, 206
Bishop, 129
Bleeding-heart, 278
Blocan, 206, 207
Block, 206
Blockhead, 207
Blok, 206
Bludgeon, 207
Blue-bells, 278
Boast, 209
Boc, 211
Bocan, 212
Bog, 207
Bogach, 207
Bogan, 207
Boket, 211
Bold, 173
Borgen, 204
Borh, 204
Bother, 207
Bowl, 211
"Bow-wow" theory, 182
Brag, 208
Braga, 209
Bragaim, 209
Bragal, 210
Braggadocio, 273
Braggle, 210
Bragio, 209
Braigaim, 210
Braighean, 210

Brat, 209, 210
Brate, 210
Bratog, 210
Brawl, 210
Brawle, 210
Breagh, 209
Break, 209
Bren, 209
Brenn, 209
Brests, 261
Breton, 201
Brisk, 210
Britain, 45, 46, 211
Britons, 45
Brol, 210
Brown-eyed Susans, 278
Brysg, 211
Buaidhirt, 208
Buaidhrim, 208
Buc, 211
Bucaid, 211
Bucca, 212
Bucket, 211
Bug, 211
Bugaboo, 212
Bugbear, 212
Buicead, 211
Bully, 210
Bump, 212
Bung, 212
Burke, 170
Burly, 212
Burne, 263
Burns, 79
Bwg, 212
Bwgan, 212

C

Cabin, 212
Cæsar, 45
Capable, 160
Capacious, 160
Capacitas, 160
Capacity, 159, 160
Caper, 274
Capriccio, 274, 275
Caprice, 274, 275
Capro, 275
Cart, 212
Catalog, 220
Celtic, 45, 48, 201
Central (Parisian) French, 53
Challenge, 250
Chambers, 250
Chance, 260
Character, 71
Chastise, 260
Chaucer, 79, 202, 204, 210
Cheke, Prof., 51, 225
Chick nor child, 277
Chilliness, 125
Chimera, 273
Chops, 257
Christianity, 128
Cicero, 103, 104, 106
Classic speech, 72
Clean speech, 80
Clerc, 130
Clericus, 130
Clock, 212
Coax, 212
Cob, 212
Cobble, 212

Cock, 212
Cog, 212
Coil, 212
Cold, 125
Complete, 168, 169
Composite tongue, 45
Concrete terms, 124
Constantly, 105
Continually, 105
Converse, 174, 175
Conversing, 176
Copious style, 150
Cornish, 201, 202
Course, 169, 170
Cowley, 175
Crabb, 173, 177
Crack, 209
Cradle, 212
Crag, 212
Crease, 212
Crock, 212
Crone, 212
Cub, 212
Curd, 212
Curiosity, 197
Curses, 112
Cut, 212

D

Dactyl, 275
Dad, 212
Dagger, 212
Daiesighe, 278
Daisy, 278
Damn, 114
Damp, 125
Dampening, 125
Damper, 125
Dampness, 125
Dandelion, 279
Danes, 48
Darn, 212
Day's eye, 278
Deacon, 130
Deadly, 162
Decalog, 221
"Declaration of Independence," 220
Deed, 160, 161
Delusion, 166
Demagog, 221
Dent de lion, 279
Depend, 273
Desultor, 274
Desultory, 274
Detestable, 176, 177
Devil's darning needle, 277
Devil's snuffbox, 277
Dewey, 114
"Ding-dong" theory, 182
Dirk, 212
Discourse, 174, 175, 176
Dispaire, 260
Dispatch, 260
Distinctions, 157
Diversity, 130, 131
Dock, 212
Docket, 212
Door, 236
Down, 212
Drab, 212

Drenched 260
Drudge, 212
Druid, 212
Dry, 126
Dude's Description of Life, A, 171
Dudgeon, 212
Dun, 212
Dune, 212
Dutch, 49

E

Each, 162
Early English, 45, 48, 50, 51, 52, 53
Earnest 213
Ecclesia, 129
Edward III, 49
Edward VI, 50
Elasticity, 65
Elaterium, 129
Ellis, Alex. J., 231
End, 161, 162
England, 47, 48
Englisc, 47
English, 49, 52
Entire, 168, 169
Epictetus, 175
Errors, 104
Esther, 275
Ethics, 63
Evangelium, 130
Every, 162
Evolutionary theory, 182
Euphemism, 60
Exaggerating, 208
Exasperate, 161
Exasperatus, 161
Execrable, 176
Experiences, 130
Expletives, 116, 118

F

Facilitas, 159
Facio, 159
Fact, 261
Facultas, 159
Faculty, 159, 160
Farragut, 113
Fast, 261
Fatal, 162
Fatherland, 91
Feeling, 98
"Fiery Charger," 91
Filthie, 261
Florida, 275
Foreign words, 49
Four-o'clocks, 278
French, 49, 51
Fresh, 211
Fret, 211
Frisky, 211
Front, 273
"Frozen music," 277
Fun, 213
Future poetry, 86

G

Gaelic, 201, 202
Gag, 213

Gall, 261
Garner, Prof., 184, 185
Genius, 100
Genius of a tongue, 79
"Gentleman," 126, 127, 208
Gestures, 59
Gewgaw, 206
Glen, 213
Glib, 213
Glossic, Ellis', 228
Goggle-eyed, 213
"Good usage," 107
"Goo-goo" theory, 182
Goth, 273
Gown, 213
Grady, H. W., 118
Greek, 50, 51, 53
Greenough, Prof., 182
Griddle, 213
Gridley, 114
Grounds, 213
Gull, 213
Guy, a, 273

H

Habilitas, 160
Harness, 261
Hart, Jno., 226
Have, 162
Healer, 130
Heart's-ease, 278
Hebrew, 53
Hebrew Scriptures, 53
Hengest, Mr., 46
Henry III, 49
Hiawatha, 276
Hieroglyphic bat, 205
Himalaya, 276
Hippocrates, 129
Hobgoblin, 212
Holland, 49
Holp, 261
Honeysuckle, 278
Honor bright, 118
House and home 277
Hue and cry, 118
Hugo, 79
Humber, 47

I

Illnesse, 262
Illusion, 166
Imagination 98
Imitation, 116
Impertinent, 126
Incentive, 273
Indo-European, 46
Ingersoll, 75, 78
Ingle, 213
Instigation, 273
Intensives, 111, 112
Intonation, 72
Irish 201, 202
Irritate, 161
Irritatus, 161

J

Jack, 274

Jag, 213
Jehu, 273
Job, 213
Johnson, Dr., 252
Jonson, 170
Jutes, 47, 48
Juvenile, 167

K

Kent, 48
Kent, Kingdom of, 47
King-fisher, 277
Kick, 213
Kith and kin, 277
Kittredge, 182
Knack, 213
Knag, 213
Knave, 213
Knick-knack, 213
Knit, 262
Knob, 213
Knock, 213
Knoll, 213
Knot, 262
Knuckle, 213

L

Lad, 213
"Lady," 208
Lady-bird, 277
Lady-slippers, 278
Lag, 213
Language, 111
Language, a development, 59
Language, an inheritance, 64
Language, a loose contrivance, 156
Language, origin of, 196
Language, the spirit of, 61
Language-change, 63
Language-growth, 57, 63
Larkspur, 278
Lass, 213
Latin, 45, 46, 48, 49, 51, 53, 103
Law-courts, 49, 51
Lawn, 213
Leave, 262
Lincoln, 113
Literary dialects, 50
Literary Pope, 104
Long-pig, 62
Loop, 213
Lord's Prayer, 228
Lothario, a gay, 273
Lounsbury, Prof., 97, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 218, 222, 229, 240, 242
Lovelace, a, 273
Low-Germans, 46
Low-Scotland, 47
Loyalty, 127
Lubber, 213
Lucerne, 275

M

Mab, 202
Maban, 202
Mace, fool's, 205
Machines, 91
Macs, 202

Madeira, 275
Magic, 274
Magnet, 274
Maiden-hair, 278
Manhattan, 275
Manila, 114
Manner, 169
Manx, 201, 202
Many a time and oft, 118
Manywhere, 73
Maqvi, 202
March, F. A., 251
Margaret, 275
Margarita, 279
Marry, 262
Masters, 100, 107
Mated, 263
Mathew, 169
Matthews, Brander, 234, 239
Mattock, 213
Meadow-sweet, 278
Meander, 273
Means, 169, 170
Mechanics, 63
Meeklings, 111
Melt, 263
Mental phenomena, 155
Mention, 165
Mercian, 47, 48
Merry, 213
Metaphor, 76
Metaphysical, 263
Method, 169
Middle English, 48
Midland, 47, 50
Might and main, 118
Milton, 176, 210
Minnehaha, 275
Mirth, 213
Mississippi, 275
Mistakes, 103
Mode, 169
Modern English, 53
Mohegan, 275
Mollycoddle, 171
Monkey-nouns, 185
Monkey-talk, 185
Monkie, 263
Mons Pileatus, 275
Morning glories, 278
Mortal, 162
Mortified, 263
Mottoes for coins, 114, 115
Mrs. Grundy, 273
Mrs. Harris, 273
Mug, 213
Muller, Max, 211, 251
Mushrooms of speech, 90
Music, 193, 194, 195
Music and poetry, 196
Music, primitive language, 190
Muslin, 274

N

Nap, 213
Nape, 213
Napoleon, 148
Nascent words, 123
Native tongue, 47
Naturalist, 130
Nerves, 263

New, the, 88
New conceptions, 89
New words, 89
Nice, 263
Nicknack, 213
Nomenclature, 134
Nook, 213
Norman, 47
Norman Conquest, 48, 51, 52
Norman French, 49, 52, 53
Northern (Northumbrian), 50
Northumbrian, 47, 48, 50
Notice, 165
Noyse, 264

O

Object, 161
Objectus, 161
Oblivious, 264
Occasion, 264
Oil, 127
Old English, 47
Ontario, 275
Opium, 129
Ormin, 224, 225
Ormulum, the, 225
Orthography, 225, 226

P

Pack, 213
Package, 213
Pad, 213
Pagan, 127, 128
Paganus, 127
Pagus, 127
Pall, 213
Pang, 213
Parallelism, 65
Passion flowers, 278
Pat, 213
Patten, S. E., 158, 159
Pavaner, 209
Peak, 213
Peake, 264
Pedagog, 221
Pert, 213
Pétrel, 276
Phaeton, 274
Phonetic style, 50
Phraseology, 72
Physical (things), 155
Physician, 130
Pick, pie, pike, pet, pitch, plod, pod, etc., 213
Pilatus, 275
Ploc, 206
Plocan, 207
Plowman, Piers, 208, 209
Poe, 79
Poetic *manner*, 87
Poetic *matter*, 87, 92
Poetic themes, organic, 88
Poetry, 85, 86, 120
Poetry and music, 189
Poke, 213
Pony, pose, pool, 213
"Poo-poo" theory, 182
Possess, 162
Post-chaise, 91
Pother, 208

Potter, prong, prop, pour, prowl, puck, pout, pucker, puddle, pug, put, 213
Precocious, 273
Predominance, 264
Presidental, 139
Primitive man, 60
Printing, Introduction of, in Eng., 50
"Professionals," 132
Program, 220
Prolog, 221
Provoco, 161
Provoke, 161
Pry, Paul, 273
Puca, 212
Puer, 166
Puerile, 166, 167
"Purple" birth, 101

Q

Quaff, 213
Quell, 265
Quib, 213
Quibble, 213
Quirk, 213

R

Racket, 213
Ravel'd, 265
Ravishing, 265
Receipt and acknowledge, 118
Reflection, 265
Relations, 60, 265
Remorse, 266
Riband, 213
Rice, 213
Ripe-apple theory, 181
Roman Empire, 128
Romic system, 228
Roosevelt, Theodore, 170
Roote, 265
Rosemary, 278
Rub, 213

S

Sacrament, 130
Safe and sane, 118
Safe and sound, 277
Salt, 127
Samuel, 176
Sandwich, 274
Saxon, 47, 48
Say, 174
Scandinavian, 48
Scholar, 130
Science, 98
Science, origin of, 196
Scintillating, 150
Seer, 130
Semitic languages, 53
Sewer, 236, 266
Shakspere, 75, 76, 106, 120, 148, 169, 170, 173, 176, 210, 286
Shamrock, 213
Sheridan, K. B., 176
Ship, 213
Shore, 236
Short-pig, 63
Signs, 59
Simon pure, 273
Simplicity, 64

Skeat, Prof., 211, 223
Skein, 213
Slap, 213
Sleave, 266
Slough, 213
Smells, 266
Smith, Sir Thos., 225
Snag, 213
Snob, 127
Sole, 266
Soul of words, 69
Sounds, 59
Southern (Saxon), 50
Spate, 213
Speak, 174, 175
Spelling, 50
Spelling reformers, 50
Spencer, Herbert, 137, 175
Spenser, 107
Spinning wheel, 91
Spirit of a tongue, 69, 70
Spiritual (things), 155
Spoil, 273
Spout, 174
Spree 213
Spurt, 174
"Square," 206
Squirrel, 276
Stab, 213
Steam engine, 91
Stephen, 275
Stevenson, R. L., 175
Story, 173
Stout, 266
Street, 126
Strength, 64
Strenuous, 170, 173
Stuffe, 266
Style, 81, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149. 150, 151, 152
Suggestion, 72, 267
Summer, 267
Sundew, 278
Susanna, 275
Swift, Mr., 208
Swinburne, 75, 79
Symbols, 60
Syntax, 97

T

Tack, tall, taper, tether, twig, 213
Tacoma, 275
Taint, 267
Tale, 173, 174
Talent, 159, 160
Talentum, 160
Talk, 174, 175
Tantalize, 161
Tantalus, 161
Tartar, 273
Technique, 98
Tell, 174, 176
Tenderness for words, 79
Tennyson, 79
Term, 167, 168
Terminology, 134
Teutonic dialects, 46
Thames, 47
Tho, 221
Thomson, 166

Thoro, 221
Thorofare, 221
"Thread-bare" themes, 87, 92, 93
Thru, 221
Thruout, 221
Tones, 60
Touch, 267
Tribulatio, 274
Tribulation, 274
Tribulum, 274
Trifles, 267
Trouble, 268
True as Gospel, 118

U

Unable, 160
Unspeak, 268
Untitled, 268
Utility, 64

V

Vandal, 273
Variations, 123
Verbena, 129
Vitriol, 129
Voltaire, 79
Vulgarisms, 133

W

Walker, Jno., 229
Wars of the Roses, 50
Way, 169
Weal and woe, 277
Well and good, 118
Welsh, 201, 202
Welt, 213
Wessex, 47, 48, 52
Whimwam, 206
White, R. G., 239, 252
Whitman, Walt, 91
Whole, 168, 162
Wilkins, Dean, 227
Wind and weather, 277
"Winds of the Soul," 273
Womanly, 268
Word-meanings, 131, 133
Word-mosaics, 61
Words, 167, 168, 74
Words, hygienic cleanliness of, 80
Words, origin of, 80
Worse, 203

Y

Youthful, 167

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